

Helping yourself and managing your stress will help you care for your baby. Remember, babies cry a lot, and babies with NAS tend to cry more often and easily.

- If you feel upset, walk away and take deep breaths for a few minutes.
- Never shake your baby or put anything over your baby's face to quiet your baby.
- Call a family member, friend, or your baby's doctor or nurse if you feel upset, angry, scared or just need help. Everyone needs help sometimes.
- Take care of yourself – take breaks, ask others for help sometimes – so you can be there when your baby really needs you.
- If you are in a drug treatment program, stay as long as your doctor says. If your doctor says you need to be in one, go.

You play an important role in helping your baby get better. Loving your baby and helping him or her stay calm and comfortable can be some of some of the best medicine your baby will ever receive.

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If you have any questions about Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome, please speak to your physician or nurse.



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Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome

A Guide for Families provided by the Family BirthPlace



What is Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS)?

Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome is a withdrawal syndrome that can occur in newborns exposed to certain drugs before birth. This brochure provides information to help guide families in supporting their babies' health needs in the hospital and after the transition to home.

When will my baby show signs of NAS?

Most babies show signs of withdrawal, or NAS, between one and five days after birth. The time it takes for signs to show can depend on how much and what kind of medicine or drug the baby's mother took and for how long. It also can depend on whether or not the baby's mother used other kinds of substances as well, such as alcohol, tobacco or additional medicines.

It is very important to tell your nurse and your baby's doctors about all medicines and drugs used during your pregnancy. This will help them treat your baby.

What are the signs of NAS?

- High-pitched cries or crankiness
- Stiff arms, legs and back
- Trouble sleeping
- Shaking, jitters or lots of sucking
- Not eating well or problems sucking
- Vomiting due to overeating or crankiness
- Fast breathing and/or stuffy nose
- Sneezing or yawning a lot
- Irritation on diaper area due to loose, watery stools
- Irritation on face, back of head, arms, and/or legs due to restlessness
- Poor weight gain after a few days of life
- Seizures, also called convulsions (hard to spot and can last seconds or minutes). Your baby may suddenly start jerking his or her arms and legs or may go stiff. You may also see eye rolling, staring, lip smacking, sucking, or a change in skin color. Seizures are a late sign of NAS.

Beginning soon after your baby's birth, nurses will check for certain signs and give your baby a "score" depending on which NAS signs are present or not. Your baby will be scored every few hours until he or she is ready to go home. The scoring helps doctors decide which types of treatment your baby needs to get better. The nurses will explain the scoring to you. If something is not clear, please ask for more information.

Treating Babies with NAS

How can I help my baby?

If your baby is showing signs of withdrawal, giving love, hugs and care may be one of the best ways you can help. *This can include:*

- Staying close to your baby
- Continually holding and swaddling your baby
- Making skin-to-skin contact with your baby
- Feeding your baby whenever he or she looks hungry
- Keeping things quiet and calm around your baby (few visitors, no noise, no bright lights)
- Breastfeeding, if advised by your physician. It is generally safe for mothers to breastfeed if they are in a stable treatment program, even if they are taking medicine given by a doctor or nurse – and even if the medicine is for drug withdrawal. Breastfeeding is not safe for mothers who are not in a treatment program, or who are using alcohol or illegal drugs. Talk to your doctor about breastfeeding and the medicines you may be taking, as well as treatment options for opiate addiction.

Practice caring for your baby while you are in the hospital so you are more comfortable when it's time to go home. Your nurse can help you learn how to swaddle your baby and can answer any other questions.

Does my baby need medicine to get better?

If your baby has many strong signs of withdrawal, your doctor may give him or her medicine to help. The medicines that babies with NAS are given most often are morphine and methadone. These medications can help your baby be calm and comfortable. Sometimes other medicines may be added. Medicines will reduce your baby's risk of having seizures. As your baby starts to get better, the dose of medicine will slowly be lowered, and then stopped. Your doctor or nurse can explain your baby's medication in more detail.

How long will my baby need treatment?

NAS can last from one week up to many weeks. The length of withdrawal depends on the medicines or drugs – and the amounts – your baby was exposed to during pregnancy.

When can my baby leave the hospital?

Babies who do not need medication to control NAS may stay in the hospital for up to a week. Many babies who need medication for NAS stay in the hospital up to three to four weeks, and rarely some may stay longer. During your baby's hospital stay, the NAS signs will lessen. Your baby will be discharged when there is little risk for serious problems.

Transitioning Home

When can I expect my baby to leave the hospital?

Parent and family support can make a big difference in how fast a baby with NAS gets better. Babies can continue to have mild symptoms of withdrawal for up to six months after leaving the hospital. *Once at home, your baby may continue to experience the following:*

- Problems feeding
- Slow weight gain
- Crankiness and crying
- Sleep problems
- Sneezing, stuffy nose and trouble breathing

Your baby's doctor and nurse will teach you ways to take care of your baby. If you have any questions or concerns or if something just does not seem right, ask questions. This helps you help your baby.

How can I support and care for my baby at home?

- Make your baby comfortable by setting up a routine and limiting visitors, noise and bright lights.
- Let your baby sleep as long as needed and without being woken up suddenly.
- Make feeding time quiet and calm, and burp your baby often.
- Talk to your baby softly and gently.
- Learn to spot your baby's "I am upset" signs, whether he or she is yawning, sneezing, shaking, crying or frowning. Also, know the signs that say your baby is happy, hungry or relaxed.
- When your baby is upset, stop what you are doing, hold your baby skin-to-skin or gently swaddle him or her in a blanket on your chest. Let your baby calm down before trying anything new, or gently sway or rock your baby. *(Do not walk or sway your baby while feeding.)*
- Gently and slowly introduce new things to your baby one at a time.
- As your baby becomes calmer for longer periods of time, start checking to see if he or she might like to have the blanket wrapped more loosely or taken off sometimes.
- Follow all of the doctor's directions for taking care of your baby and yourself.