

Parent Information Sheet: Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS)

What is neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS)?

NAS is a group of symptoms or problems that a baby can have after exposure to certain medications or drugs while in their mother's womb. Neonatal abstinence syndrome is another phrase for infant drug withdrawal.

Why do babies get NAS?

During pregnancy, a special organ, the placenta, connects mother and baby. Any drugs the mother takes, the baby also "takes" as the mother and baby share a blood supply through the placenta. When the baby is born, they are no longer exposed to the mother's medication or drug. Because the baby isn't getting the drug anymore, they are now "going cold turkey". This can lead to infant withdrawal. Withdrawal can occur within a few hours to a few days after birth.

Do all exposed babies go through withdrawal (NAS)?

No; however, it is not possible to tell which babies will have withdrawal symptoms or how long the symptoms will last. A baby who shows signs of withdrawal will need to stay in the hospital for as short as a few days or possibly longer. In rare cases, a baby will need to be transferred to Anchorage for continued support for up to a few weeks. Sometimes these babies need to be treated with medicines to help lessen the withdrawal symptoms.

How can I help my baby?

Our hospital staff will help you learn ways of soothing your baby. You and your family/partner are the best treatment! While in rare cases medicines may be needed to help a withdrawing baby eat, sleep, and be comfortable, nothing can replace a family's love and comfort!

What if I have questions?

Ask, ask, ask!! There are many team members caring for your baby -- doctors, nurses, and you. Parenting a newborn can be exciting, overwhelming, and tiring. Parenting a baby with withdrawal can be even more so. Ask, ask, ask any questions you have!!

What are some symptoms of withdrawal in babies?

Jitteriness or severe trembling/shakiness

Overactive sucking

Difficult to console or quiet down

High-pitched cry

Diarrhea

Fever, sweating

Trouble falling asleep or staying asleep

Poor Feeding

Sneezing or stuffy nose

Yawning a lot

Severe diaper rash

In severe cases, seizures

Things Parents Can Do to Comfort to their Babies

Ways to decrease stimulation to your baby

Dim the lights in the room and keep the noise low

Use slow, gentle handling methods

How to help your baby learn to self-soothe:

Offer your finger for sucking or help the baby find their hand to suck

Swaddling/ wrapping in a blanket or sleep sack

Other things to do:

Holding your baby so your skin touches the baby's skin



Use of a swing

Low, soothing music

Gently rocking baby while holding the baby in an upright (head up) position

Rubbing the baby's back for burping rather than patting their back.

Your family or partner can help too!