



Neonatal abstinence syndrome

Studer Family 
Children's Hospital
Ascension Sacred Heart



Planning care for you and your baby

Reading this booklet can help you:

- Learn how certain drugs can affect your baby during pregnancy and after birth.
- Understand your baby's needs.
- Learn how to care for your baby in the hospital and after you go home.

Remember that, during pregnancy, almost every drug you have taken can be passed on to your baby. When born, your baby may show signs of withdrawal.

What is neonatal abstinence syndrome?

Neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS) refers to withdrawal signs that babies may have if a mother took methadone or “downers” (drugs that make a person feel relaxed and sleepy) during pregnancy.

This includes mom’s use of prescription medications such as:

- Hydromorphone
- Fentanyl
- Methadone
- Morphine
- Oxycodone
- OxyContin
- Percocet
- Subutex
- Tylenol #3
- Ultram

**Remember: It doesn't matter how you got here ...
it's where you go from here.**

What are the signs/symptoms of withdrawal?

Common signs of withdrawal:

- Crying a lot which may be high pitched
- Diarrhea that causes a diaper rash
- Difficulty in being calmed down (consoled)
- Feeding poorly — weak suck, spitting up
- Fussy
- Increased tone (muscle tightness/stiffness)
- Needs to be comforted with pacifier
- Shaking (trembling) even when sleeping
- Sneezing a lot
- Stuffy nose
- Sweating
- Trouble sleeping
- Very sensitive to light, sounds and touch
- Yawning a lot

If your baby develops signs of withdrawal, comforting him/her can reduce these signs.

When does withdrawal start and how long will it last?

Withdrawal signs can begin within a few hours up to days after birth. If and when withdrawal happens depends on:

- The drug/drugs taken during pregnancy.
- How often the drug was taken.
- How long the drug was taken.

Just like adults, not all babies will withdraw the same way. Your baby's doctor will need to watch your baby closely for at least 5-7 days. Babies who need medicine may need to be treated for a few weeks. Babies might have withdrawal signs up to 6 months after leaving the hospital.

We want you to provide breast milk unless there is a reason your baby cannot breast feed. Your baby cannot have your breast milk if you are HIV positive or if you are using illegal drugs and/or alcohol.

Your breast milk may help your baby need less medication for their withdrawal signs.



Eat, Sleep and Console (ESC)

“Eat, Sleep and Console (ESC)” is the first choice of our nursery in managing your baby’s withdrawal symptoms. This requires parents and family to be present and involved in the care of your baby during his/her hospital stay.

The Eat, Sleep and Console program has been found to:

- Increase the bond between you and your baby.
- Reduce the length of your baby’s stay.
- Reduce the need for additional medication.

Your nurse will score your baby based on the following:

Eating well? How well your baby eats from the breast/bottle. This is how well your baby sucks, swallows, breathes and latches during breast/bottle feeding. The goal is adequate volume so your baby is satisfied between feeds.

- Yes = ESC score 0
- No = ESC score 1

Sleeping well? Able to sleep for 60 minutes.

- Yes = ESC score 0
- No = ESC score 1

Consoles? Able to console/calm your baby in 10 minutes or less.

- Yes = ESC score 0
- No = ESC score 1

Your baby’s ESC scores (eating, sleeping and consolability/calming), will determine if your baby will need treatment with medication.

If your baby’s ESC score is > 1 and your baby is difficult to console/calm, a medication may be given.

Morphine is the drug of choice for the ESC program.

Ways to help your baby in the NICU:

- If your baby is asleep when you arrive, let them sleep and pick your baby up after he/she wakes up.
- Stay close to your baby but take breaks.
- Hold and swaddle your baby (gently wrapping with a blanket).
- Breast feed at least every 3-4 hours.
- Feed your baby whenever he/she seems or acts hungry.
- Make skin-to-skin contact with your baby.
- Diaper rash cream should be put on with each diaper change to prevent and/or treat diaper rash.
- Keep surroundings quiet and calm around your baby (few visitors, gentle sounds, and soft lighting).
- Help your baby's self-calming abilities by:
 - Applying gentle pressure to hold the baby's arms and legs at the center of his/her body.
 - Providing a pacifier for sucking.
- Learn/understand your baby's needs and how to respond to them.
- More comfort measures are:
 - Gentle rocking
 - Holding baby up against your chest
 - Rubbing your baby's back
 - Use of warm blanket

Different ways that babies tell us how they feel

Signs that your baby is happy and comfortable:

- I am sleeping soundly.
- I am smiling when I am 6 weeks old.
- My body is quiet.
- My face and hands are relaxed.
- When awake, I am calm and looking around.

Signs that your baby is upset:

- Avoiding eye contact
- Crying, hiccupping, sneezing or yawning
- Fast breathing
- Frantic (wild) arm movements
- Holding hands out in “stop” signal
- Pale color or mottled (blotchy) skin
- Stiffening of legs and arms

When your baby goes home ... the journey continues

Parent and family support can make a difference in how fast a baby with NAS feels better. Babies can continue to have signs of withdrawal for up to six months after going home.

After going home, your baby may continue to experience the following:

- Fussiness
- Not able to sleep
- Problems eating
- Slow weight gain
- Sneezing, stuffy nose

Babies with NAS tend to cry more often. Being rested can help you handle your baby's stress better.



A summary of comfort measures:

- Dress your baby in one outfit. You can add a blanket if it is cold.
- Gently rub your baby's back.
- Give a pacifier as needed.
- Hold your baby up and support his/her head.
- Hold your baby with his or her arms close to their chest.
- Keep your baby's area quiet and calm.
- Keep the lights low.
- Let your baby sleep (wake for eating every 3-4 hours).
- Limit visitors.
- Sit and gently rock your baby.
- Use a soft voice.

It is important for you to continue to spend time with your baby. The time you spend with your baby in the hospital will help you understand your baby's behavior.

- Call a family member or a friend if you feel upset, angry, scared, or just need help. Everyone needs help sometimes. Do not be afraid or embarrassed to ask for help.
- If you feel upset, put your baby in a safe place, then walk away and take deep breaths for a few minutes.
- Never shake your baby or put anything over your baby's face to get them to stop crying.
- Sit down and gently rock your baby to calm him/her.
- Sit in a quiet, softly lit room to feed your baby.
- Swaddle, gentle rocking, or use skin-to-skin contact with your baby to help calming.
- Talk to your baby softly and gently.

Community resources to support you and your baby

- WISE Program of Community Drug and Alcohol Commission
- Lakeview Center intake service for assessment of needs for counseling and substance abuse programs
- Lakeview Center Methadone Clinic and Metro (Methadone) Clinic, including individual and group counseling
- Alpha Center for practical support (supplies, equipment, etc.) and spiritual encouragement
- Department of Children and Families (DCF) for placement of various services needed in the home — ongoing support
- Families First Network for ongoing individual and family counseling and guidance, including referral to other community agencies
- 90 Works for longer-term follow-up to provide support for jobs, transportation, etc.
- Florida Healthy Start for ongoing home visits and care of the newborn
- Adult and Child Mental Health Care as agency for counseling and guidance for family with any funding status.



You are a big part of helping your baby get better.



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