

Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS) A Guide for Parents

What is NAS?

A baby who is born to a mother taking drugs (even those ordered by a doctor) may become addicted during the pregnancy, and once born, may show signs of withdrawal. This withdrawal is called Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS).

The majority of babies who have NAS begin to show signs within the first 24-72 hours after birth. This also depends upon the dose of drugs the mother was taking before birth.

How is NAS diagnosed?

NAS is diagnosed when a baby has a combination of the signs listed below.

- High pitch cry
- Tremors/jittering
- Stuffy nose/ sneezing
- Feeding problems, including poor weight gain
- Increased breathing rate
- Irritability
- Fever
- Problems sleeping
- Tense arms, legs and back
- Vomiting/ diarrhea
- Skin irritation

How long does the withdrawal process last?

NAS can last from one week to six months

What is NAS Scoring?

The NAS scoring is a system used by staff to assess the severity of a baby's withdrawal symptoms. The baby's doctor will determine when and how often to score your baby.

Will my baby need to go to the NICU?

Your baby will be admitted to the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) if he/she needs to be medicated for NAS or for closer monitoring of withdrawal symptoms. Your baby will be in a smaller, quiet room to decrease noise and stimulation.





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How can I help?

You can help your baby by staying with them in the NICU as much as possible to feed, settle and hold your baby. Many parents find their baby settles easier when held closely.

How long will my baby be in the NICU?

Babies experiencing NAS could spend 4 – 10 weeks in the NICU.

How is NAS treated?

Your baby's doctor will order medications to decrease the symptoms of NAS and reduce the possibility of seizures. Methadone, morphine or Phenobarbital are common medications ordered.

The process of scoring, assessing and reducing (weaning) the medication continues until the baby has stopped having signs of withdrawal. Each baby is different in how they respond to being weaned off the medication.

Parent's feelings when their baby experiences NAS

Many parents describe the time their baby spends in withdrawal as an emotional roller coaster.

The staff acknowledges and understands that this is a very stressful and emotional time. Take comfort in the knowledge that we all have the same goal - to help you and your baby through the withdrawal and to go home as soon as possible.

When You Go Home

The symptoms of NAS may continue for up to six months. Over time the symptoms gradually decrease in intensity.

Once at home your baby may continue to experience:

- Difficulty with attachment during breastfeeding
- Colic
- Poor sleeping patterns
- Slow weight gain



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It is helpful to feed and settle your baby in a quiet room with little noise and disturbances.

Keep all follow up appointments with your baby's doctor.

Behavior Patterns

Behavior	Calming Suggestions
Prolonged crying (may be high pitched)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hold baby close to your body perhaps wrapped in a sheet• Decrease loud noises, bright lights, excessive handling• Humming, gentle rocking may help.
Sleeplessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reduce noise, bright lights, patting or touching baby too much.• Soft, gentle music/rocking may help• Clean dry bottom, check for rash or skin irritation• Feed baby on demand
Excessive sucking of fists	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cover hands with gloves or mittens if skin becomes damaged• Keep areas of damaged skin clean (avoid lotions/creams as the baby may suck them)
Difficult or poor feeding	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Feed small amounts often• Feed in quiet, calm surroundings with minimal noise and disturbance.• Allow time for resting between sucking
Sneezing, stuffy nose or breathing troubles	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Keep baby's nose and mouth clean• Avoid overdressing or wrapping the baby too tightly• Feed the baby slowly, allowing for rest periods between feeds• Smaller feeds more often may help• Keep baby in semi-sitting position, well supported and supervised• Don't place your baby to sleep on its tummy.



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Regurgitation and/or vomiting	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Burp the baby each time he/she stops sucking and after the feed• Support the baby's cheeks and lower jaw to enhance sucking/swallowing efforts• Keep the baby clean and bedding free of vomit. The smell may increase irritability and irritate the baby's skin.
Hyperactivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use soft flannel blankets or a short haired sheep skin covered by a cotton sheet for baby's comfort
Trembling	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Keep baby in warm quiet room• Avoid excessive handling of baby
Fever	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Avoid excessive blankets• Avoid overwrapping baby

Please call your doctor for any questions or concerns you may have regarding this information.



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