

Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS)

SAINT BARNABAS MEDICAL CENTER
NEONATAL INTENSIVE CARE UNIT

What is Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome?

Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS) is the symptoms of withdrawal that a baby may show after birth when their mothers have taken drugs that can be addictive, during their pregnancy. There is no way to predict which babies will have NAS. The amount of drugs the baby gets in the womb does not always tell if the baby will have symptoms of NAS after birth.

Why does NAS happen?

NAS happens when a pregnant woman uses addictive drugs or substances during her pregnancy. These drugs pass across the placenta to the unborn baby. The unborn baby becomes addicted to the drugs the mother has taken. After birth, the baby no longer has the drugs from the mother and begins to have symptoms of withdrawal.

Most common drugs to cause NAS:

- **Narcotics:** Morphine, Oxycodone, Percocet, Vicodin, and Methadone
- **Antidepressants:** Prozac, Zoloft, Celexa, Paxil
- **Muscle relaxants:** Valium, Xanax, Ativan
- **Other addictive drugs:** cocaine, heroin, ecstasy, methamphetamines

A baby with NAS may show 1 or more of the following symptoms:

- wildly sucking on fists or pacifier
- irritability
- high-pitched cry
- poor sleeper
- sweating or fever
- diarrhea
- vomiting
- jitteriness
- tremors (little shakes)
- poor feeding
- stuffy nose
- fast breathing
- yawning or sneezing
- stiff arms, legs
- seizures

When will my baby show symptoms of NAS?

Many babies will show symptoms within 2-3 days after birth. Some babies may show symptoms earlier and some may not have them until 10 days of life. The difference in when symptoms happen may be due to:

- how long the drug was active in the mother
- how long before birth the drug was last taken
- whether 1 or more drugs were being used at the same time.

How does the doctor know a baby has NAS?

- From hearing the mother's pregnancy history
- From a positive maternal drug screen
- From a positive drug screen (usually urine) from the baby
- From observing symptoms of the baby

How will NAS be treated?

When a baby has symptoms of NAS, a special scoring tool is used to help the staff decide how severe the symptoms are. This helps the doctor determine the right treatment for the baby. If the baby has high scores he may need to be given medication to decrease the withdrawal symptoms. Morphine is commonly used to treat NAS.

Some babies will need to stay in the hospital less than a week, and some with more severe withdrawal may be here longer.

Some additional things can be done to help minimize the withdrawal symptoms of the baby which include:

- Speak quietly
- Keep the lights low
- Use gentle touch
- Offer the pacifier
- Avoid overheating
- Do skin-to-skin (Kangaroo Care)
- Swaddle the baby with their hands close to their mouth
- Minimize stimulation
- Provide gentle rocking in an upright position

Can a baby with NAS breastfeed?

1. Breastfeeding may decrease the incidence of NAS, the need for medication for treatment and the length of stay however; breastfeeding may cause sedation in some of these breastfeeding infants.
2. The Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine supports breastfeeding when women who have been abstinent from illicit or licit drugs or substances for 90 days prior to delivery, including sobriety in an outpatient setting.

What can you do for your NAS baby?

It is important for you to be with your baby as much as possible. This will help you to bond and get to know your baby better. This will help you be able to comfort and care for your baby both here in the hospital and when your baby goes home.

If you have any questions, please ask your nurse or doctor.