



PR aMS

Positive Recovery and Midwife Support

A service for women with complex needs.

Making recovery possible in pregnancy.

Supporting women, babies and families for a brighter future.

NEONATAL ABSTINENCE SYNDROME

Neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS) is a condition babies can experience if the mother has used illegal substances or prescribed medication during pregnancy

See overleaf for information and advice on how to minimise the risk.

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Causes

NAS may occur when a pregnant woman takes drugs such as heroin, codeine, oxycodone (OxyContin), methadone, or buprenorphine. These and other substances pass through the placenta that connects the baby to its mother in the womb. The baby becomes dependent on the drug along with the mother.

If the mother continues to use the drugs within the week or so before delivery, the baby may be dependent on the drug at birth. Because the baby is no longer getting the drug after birth, withdrawal symptoms may occur as the drug is slowly cleared from the baby's system.

Withdrawal symptoms also may occur in babies exposed to alcohol, benzodiazepines, barbiturates, and certain antidepressants (SSRIs) while in the womb.

Babies of mothers who use other addictive drugs (nicotine, amphetamines, cocaine, marijuana,) may have long-term problems. While there is no clear evidence of a NAS for other drugs, they may contribute to the severity of a baby's NAS symptoms.

During the first 24 hours your baby may not show any signs of withdrawal. You will be informed around length of stay in hospital during your pregnancy – usually around 5 days.

Symptoms

Blotchy skin colouring (mottling), Diarrhoea, Excessive crying or high-pitched crying, Excessive sucking, Fever, Hyperactive reflexes, Increased muscle tone, Irritability, Poor feeding, Rapid breathing, Slow weight gain, Stuffy nose, sneezing

Staff will observe baby closely and will undertake observations on baby every 4 hours and record on a special chart. Depending on how baby is behaving and responding will depend on whether baby will need to be cared for on the Special Care Baby Unit or can continue to be cared for on the postnatal ward. The staff will keep you updated on baby's progress and will inform you if they are concerned and will discuss further treatment with you. If your baby needs admission to SCBU- you will be encouraged to breastfeed with help and support from staff. It is VERY important that you have ceased taking street drugs if you wish to breastfeed your baby. You will be supported to breast feed your baby whilst on methadone only- this is passed through the breast milk in tiny amounts but can provide some comfort to baby, as well as skin to skin contact.

Treatment

Treatment depends on:

- The drug involved
- The infant's overall health and abstinence scores
- Whether the baby was born full-term or premature

Infants with NAS are often fussy and hard to calm. Babies who are experiencing NAS :

- Like to be rocked/swayed to sleep and held firmly
- Staff will try and reduce noise and lights
- Swaddling the baby in a blanket sometimes helps baby to settle.
- Using a dummy to help settle the frantic sucking

If you have taken opiates, and your baby is experiencing NAS- your baby will be treated with oramorph (oral morphine) to help with the symptoms then slowly reduced.

If you have been taking Benzodiazepines, then your baby will require a different medication. This medication may require your baby to be hospital a number of weeks until the medication is stopped.

Babies with this condition often have severe nappy rash or other areas of skin breakdown. This requires treatment with special ointment or cream.

Babies may also have problems with feeding or putting on adequate weight gain. These problems may require:

- Higher-calorie feedings that provide greater nutrition
- Smaller feedings given more often

Treatment helps relieve symptoms of withdrawal. Even after medical treatment for NAS is over and babies leave the hospital, they still may be difficult to settle and easily irritated at home. Following delivery of your baby, a sample of urine will be taken to test for substances. You will be informed about this during your pregnancy. This is make sure that if baby needs any treatment it will be the right treatment for your baby.

It is important to talk to your health care provider about your options for treatment. Please contact us if you feel you need support