

NEONATAL OPIOID WITHDRAWAL SYNDROME

CONGRATULATIONS ON YOUR NEW BABY!

Having a new baby is a happy time, but all parents experience challenges in their baby's first year. Some newborns need extra love and attention, including those with **neonatal opioid withdrawal syndrome (NOWS)** or **neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS)**.

NOWS happens when babies are exposed to opioids in the womb. Babies can go through withdrawal after birth.¹ NOWS is a group of symptoms that can take up to 10-14 days to start. Doctors can treat NOWS to help you and your baby.

Mothers who take medications for opioid use disorder (MOUD) during pregnancy usually have babies with less severe NOWS. A higher dose of MOUD medication does not make NOWS symptoms worse. It is important to take the amount of medication prescribed by your doctor.

NOWS SYMPTOMS³

- Irritation due to loose, watery stools
- Blotchy skin
- Fever
- Excessive sucking
- Irritability
- Poor feeding
- Sleep problems
- Stiff arms, legs, and back
- Shaking or jitters
- Seizures or convulsions
- Vomiting from eating too much or crankiness
- Fast breathing and/or stuffy nose
- Excessive sneezing or yawning

WHEN TO CALL A DOCTOR⁴

Your baby may start to have symptoms when you are home from the hospital. It is important to call your doctor if you see any of the four issues listed below. Call 911 if there is an emergency and your baby has a seizure, stops breathing, or turns blue.

1

Your baby's symptoms are getting worse.

2

Your baby is not eating.

3

Your baby is having diarrhea or vomiting.

4

Your baby cannot be calmed down.

HOW CAN I HELP MY BABY?³

If your baby has NOWS, their symptoms can be treated. Some babies may need medications to help them feel better. You can help your baby by doing the items listed below. You and your doctor can put together a plan to help your baby be happy and healthy.



STAY CLOSE

- Hold your baby. Skin-to-skin contact is important.
- Swaddle your baby.
- Feed your baby when they seem hungry.

ROOMING

- Sleep in the same room as your baby, but not in the same bed.
- Keep your home quiet and calm. Limit visitors, light, and noise.

BREASTFEEDING

- Ask your doctor for more information about breastfeeding while taking MOUD treatment.
- Breastfeeding can help your baby's symptoms.

MEDICATION

- Your doctor may give your baby medicine if your baby has strong signs of withdrawal.
- Babies often recover from NOWS well with minimal long-term effects.

YOU ARE NOT ALONE

The number of babies born with NAS increased by 82% nationally from 2010 to 2017. Seven newborns were diagnosed with neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS) for every 1,000 newborn hospital stays.⁵

Caring for Yourself is Vital

It can be hard to care for a baby with NAS/NOWS. You may also be struggling with your own issues. It is important to take care of yourself.⁶

- Ask for help from family and friends.
- Ask someone you trust to care for your baby every once in a while so you have time to care for yourself.

References:

¹Hudak, M. L., & Tan, R. C. (2012). Neonatal drug withdrawal. *Pediatrics*, 129(2), e540–e560. Retrieved from <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/129/2/e540.abstract> (accessed February, 18, 2021)

²A.D.A.M. Medical Encyclopedia [Internet]. Johns Creek (GA): Ebix, Inc., A.D.A.M.; c1997-2021. Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome; [updated 2021 Apr 2; reviewed 2021 Apr 26; cited 2021 Apr 26]. Available from: https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/007313.htm?utm_source=email&utm_medium=share&utm_campaign=mplus_share

³Ohio Perinatal Quality Collaborative. Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome: A Guide for Families. Cincinnati, OH 45229:Ohio Perinatal Quality Collaborative; 2018.

⁴Nationwide Children's Hospital. Neonatal abstinence syndrome. <https://www.nationwidechildrens.org/conditions/neonatal-abstinence-syndrome>. Published 2019. Accessed July 23, 2021.

⁵National Center for Health Statistics. Health, United States, 2019. Hyattsville, Maryland. 2021. DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.15620/cdc.100685>.external icon

⁶https://www.mnhospitals.org/Portals/0/Documents/patientsafety/NAS/Mayo_UnderstandingNASwithdrawal.pdf