

Understanding NAS

MotherToBaby Georgia
Newsletter

Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS) refers to a group of conditions that occur in infants who are experiencing withdrawal after exposure to depressant drugs while in the womb.

When a pregnant woman uses certain drugs or medications, or misuses these substances, there is a chance that the drug will pass through the placenta and affect the development of her baby by exposing him or her to the drug. If this drug is taken regularly, babies become accustomed to this exposure. NAS occurs when there is a sudden discontinuation of exposure to these drugs after birth. The following drugs have been associated with causing NAS in newborns:

- Opioids (i.e. Codeine, Morphine, Oxycodone, Heroin)
- Some types of antidepressants
- Some sleeping pills (i.e. Benzodiazepines)

The term, Neonatal Opioid Withdrawal Syndrome (NOWS), is sometimes used to define withdrawal symptoms experienced by newborns. NOWS and NAS mean similar things. NOWS just refers to withdrawal symptoms caused specifically by opioids.

Information from this newsletter was found at:
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
March of Dimes

Signs & Symptoms

Symptoms of NAS can appear differently in different babies. A healthcare provider or family member may begin to notice signs within the first three days to a few weeks after birth.

Symptoms Include:

- Trouble sleeping and restlessness
- Irritability, excessive and high-pitched crying
- Fast-paced breathing
- Runny nose and sneezing
- Body shakes and possible seizures
- Slow weight gain and trouble feeding

It is important to remember that signs of NAS are influenced by:

- the number of weeks at which the baby was born
- the type of drugs and how long the drugs were used while the mother was still pregnant
- how the baby's body breaks down the drugs



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Quitting “cold turkey” is not always the best option. It is important to discuss the best treatment option for you and your baby with your healthcare provider.

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Understanding the Facts

- A baby born with NAS is NOT born “addicted to drugs.” The symptoms they experience are caused by their body’s adjustments to no longer being exposed to the drug.
- Opioids are one of the illicit substances that pregnant women seek treatment for, other drugs can cause withdrawal as well.
- Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT) is a form of treatment for Opioid Use Disorder (OUD) that uses medications to support the transition of individuals away from misusing opioids. MAT is a helpful option for mothers wanting to quit using opioids while pregnant.
- Babies do better when the mother is treated with medication than they do when mom has no treatment at all for her OUD. Hospitals do have to report to child welfare agencies when a woman giving birth uses drugs; getting treatment for opioid use while pregnant and after birth shows a commitment to creating a safe environment for a baby.

**Questions?
Please Reach Out!**

Treatment Options

Treating NAS in infants largely depends on the severity of the baby’s exposure to drugs.

Non-medical approaches include:

- Swaddling
- Skin-to-skin care
- Limiting bright lights and loud noises
- Breastfeeding
- Incorporating high-calorie diets

Depending on the severity of the symptoms, some babies require medical treatment with medication. Once withdrawal is under control, healthcare providers can decrease the dosage and allow the baby to adjust off the medication completely.

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