Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS)

Treatment

Specific treatment for NAS will be determined by your baby’s physician based on the Finnegan scores and extent of withdrawal symptoms.

Babies experiencing withdrawal are often irritable and have a difficult time being comforted. They should be comforted with dim lights, minimal stimulation and a quiet room. Swaddling, snugly wrapping the baby in a blanket or skin-to-skin contact may help comfort your baby, too.

Breastfeeding can be a safe option with some medications. Please discuss your feeding plans with your baby’s care team. **Breastfeeding should not be stopped abruptly as this could cause an increase in withdrawal symptoms.** Talk to your baby’s physician if you plan to wean or stop breastfeeding once you are home as this may change your baby’s treatment.

If treatment with medication has begun, your baby will need to stay in the hospital until his or her symptoms are well-controlled. Your baby’s response to treatment will determine how long he or she will be in the hospital.

More Information

Mission Children’s Hospital NICU
509 Biltmore Avenue
Asheville, NC 28801
828-213-8600
missionchildrens.org

Going Home

Once a discharge date has been identified, you will need to schedule a pediatrician appointment as directed by your baby’s care team.

Methadone requires prior approval from Medicaid. If your baby is assigned a Medicaid number before discharge, your discharge planner will file for prior approval. If a Medicaid number has not been assigned prior to discharge, you will need to contact your baby’s pediatrician to file for prior approval.

Home Health will be ordered if it is available in the area where you live. A Home Health nurse will assist you and your physician with a plan for the weaning process. Your baby will be enrolled in the Early Intervention program to assist with the developmental aspects of withdrawal.

Your baby will return to the Developmental Follow-up program of Mission Children’s Hospital, located at the Reuter Outpatient Center.

If your baby continues to have signs of withdrawal, please call your pediatrician.

Understanding Your Baby’s Treatment Plan

Mission Children’s Hospital is part of Mission Health, which has been named one of the Top 15 Health Systems in the nation by Truven Health Analytics for the third year in a row.
Neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS) is a term for a group of problems a baby experiences when withdrawing from exposure to opiates, such as methadone.

**Causes of NAS**

Almost every drug passes from the mother’s blood stream through the placenta to the fetus. Substances that cause drug dependence and addiction in the mother also cause the fetus to become dependent. At birth, the baby’s dependence on the substance continues. However, since the drug is no longer available, the baby may begin to show signs and symptoms of withdrawal.

**A Diagnosis**

An accurate report of the mother’s methadone use or other drug exposure is important, including the time of the last drug taken. A neonatal abstinence scoring system may be used to help diagnose and grade the severity of the withdrawal. Using the Finnegan scoring system, points are assigned for certain signs and symptoms. This scoring may also help in planning treatment.

**Symptoms of NAS**

Symptoms of NAS may vary depending on the type of substance used, the last time it was used, and whether the baby is full-term or premature. Symptoms of withdrawal may begin as early as 24-48 hours after birth, or as late as 5-10 days. (There have been cases noted to begin as late as 3-4 weeks).

This list includes the most common symptoms of NAS. However, each baby may experience symptoms differently.

- Seizures
- Yawning, stuffy nose and sneezing
- Poor feeding and sucking
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Dehydration
- Sweating
- Fever or unstable temperature
- Rapid Breathing

The symptoms of NAS may resemble other conditions or medical problems. Always consult your baby’s physician for a diagnosis.