

# NEONATAL ABSTINENCE SYNDROME (NAS)

## What is neonatal abstinence syndrome?

Neonatal abstinence syndrome (also called NAS) is a group of conditions caused when a baby withdraws from certain drugs he's exposed to in the womb before birth.

NAS is most often caused when a woman takes drugs called opioids during pregnancy. When you take these drugs during pregnancy, they can pass through the placenta and cause serious problems for your baby. The placenta grows in your uterus (womb) and supplies your baby with food and oxygen through the umbilical cord. Even if you use an opioid exactly as your health care provider tells you to, it may cause NAS in your baby.

If you've been injured or had surgery, your provider may give you a prescription for opioids to help relieve pain. Prescription opioids include:

- Codeine
- Hydrocodone (name brand Vicodin®)
- Morphine (name brands Kadian®, Avinza®)
- Oxycodone (name brands OxyContin®, Percocet®)
- Tramadol

The street drug heroin also is an opioid.

Other prescription drugs that can cause NAS include:

- Antidepressants (used to treat depression)
- Benzodiazepines (sleeping pills)

**If you're pregnant or trying to get pregnant and taking any of these drugs, tell your health care provider right away.**

## Signs & symptoms of NAS

Signs and symptoms of NAS can be different for every baby.

- Most happen within 3 days (72 hours) of birth
- Some may happen right after birth or not until a few weeks after birth
- Symptoms can last from 1 week to 6 months after birth

Signs and symptoms may include:

- Body shakes (tremors), seizures (convulsions), overactive reflexes (twitching) and tight muscle tone
- Fussiness, excessive crying or having a high-pitched cry
- Poor feeding or sucking or slow weight gain
- Breathing problems, including breathing really fast
- Fever, sweating or blotchy skin
- Trouble sleeping and lots of yawning
- Diarrhea or throwing up
- Stuffy nose or sneezing

If your baby has signs or symptoms of NAS, call her provider right away. Your baby's signs and symptoms of NAS depend on:

- What drug you used during pregnancy, how much you used and how long you took it
- How your own body breaks down the drug
- If your baby was born prematurely (before 37 weeks)

### Complications NAS can cause for your baby

NAS makes your baby at increased risk of:

- **Low birthweight.** Born weighing less than 5 pounds, 8 ounces.
- **Jaundice.** Your baby's skin and eyes look yellow.
- **Needing to stay in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) after birth.**
- **Needing treatment with medicine**

### Preventing NAS in your baby

Here's what you can do:

- **If you're pregnant and you use any of the drugs that can cause NAS, tell your provider right away, but don't stop taking the drug without getting treatment from your provider first.** Quitting suddenly (sometimes called cold turkey) can cause severe problems for your baby, including death. Getting treatment can help you stop using drugs and is safer for your baby than getting no treatment at all.
- **If you're pregnant and addicted to opioids, ask your provider about medication-assisted treatment.** Medicines used in MAT include methadone and buprenorphine.
- **If you're pregnant and you go to a provider who prescribes medicine to treat a health condition, make sure that provider knows you're pregnant.** Ask all your health care providers if the medicine you take—even prescription drugs—can cause NAS in your baby. Even if you use a prescription drug exactly as your provider tells you to, it may cause NAS in your baby.
- **If you're pregnant or thinking about getting pregnant, tell your provider about any drugs or medicine you take.** Your provider can make sure that what you're taking is safe for you and your baby. She also can help you get treatment for using street drugs or abusing prescription drugs if you need it.
- **If you're not pregnant and you use any drug that can cause NAS:** Use birth control until you're ready to get pregnant.

### Treating NAS

Your baby's treatment may include:

- Taking medicines to treat or manage severe withdrawal symptoms. Once withdrawal is under control, your baby gets smaller doses of the medicine over time so her body can adjust to being off the medicine. Medicines used to treat severe withdrawal include morphine, methadone and buprenorphine.
- Getting fluids through a needle into a vein (IV) to prevent your baby from getting dehydrated. Babies with NAS can get dehydrated from having diarrhea or throwing up a lot.
- Drinking higher-calorie baby formula. Some babies with NAS need extra calories to help them grow because they have trouble feeding or slow growth.

### Most babies with NAS who get treatment get better in 5 to 30 days.

While your baby's being treated for NAS, he may be fussy and hard to soothe. Doing these things can help calm him:

- Swaddle your baby in a blanket.
- Give your baby skin-to-skin care. It's when you put your baby, dressed only in a diaper, on your bare chest.
- Keep your baby in a quiet, dimly lit room.
- Breastfeed your baby.