

Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome

Patient Education Module

Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome

Neonatal abstinence syndrome (also called NAS) is a group of conditions a newborn can have if exposed to addictive substances in the womb before birth. A fetus can become addicted to these substances and then experience drug withdrawal after birth. Babies with NAS are more likely than other babies to be born with low birth weight (less than 5 pounds, 8 ounces), have breathing and feeding problems and seizures. They also usually have to stay in the hospital longer after birth than babies without NAS. Substances ingested during pregnancy, can pass through the placenta to your baby. The placenta grows in your uterus and supplies your baby with food and oxygen through the umbilical cord.

Neonatal abstinence syndrome is a condition that affects many organ systems, including the: central nervous system, gastrointestinal, metabolic, respiratory, and vasomotor involvement. Common symptoms include: tremors, hyperirritability, seizures, fever, stuffy nose or sneezing, sweating or blotchy skin, increased respiratory rate, increased sucking, excessive crying, poor feeding, diarrhea, vomiting, respiratory compromise, and weight loss.

Substances that are associated with neonatal withdrawal include: opiates, heroin, methadone, caffeine, cocaine, ethanol, marijuana, PCP, and nicotine.

In addition to NAS, abusing substances during pregnancy can cause your baby to be born with birth defects. A birth defect is a health condition that is present at birth. Birth defects can change the shape or function of one or more parts of the body, as well as, result in decreased mental abilities.

What can you do to help prevent NAS in your baby?

If you're pregnant and you use any of the substances that can cause NAS, tell your health care 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*. If you need help to stop using these drugs, talk to your provider about treatment to help you quit. Getting treatment can help you stop using drugs and is safer for your baby than getting no treatment at all.

If you're addicted to opioids, medication-assisted treatment (also called MAT) during pregnancy can help your baby. NAS in babies may be easier to treat for babies whose moms get MAT during pregnancy. Medicines used in MAT include methadone and buprenorphine.

Even if you use a prescription drug exactly as your provider tells you to, it may cause NAS in your baby. During pregnancy, tell your prenatal care provider about any drug or medicine you take. If you go to a health care provider who prescribes medicine to treat a health condition (like sleep problems or severe pain), make sure that provider knows you're pregnant. You may need to stop taking certain medicines or change to medicine that's safer for your baby. Ask all your health care providers if the drugs you take—even prescription drugs—can cause NAS in your baby.

If you're not pregnant and using any of the drugs that can cause NAS, use birth control until you're ready to get pregnant. Birth control (also called contraception or family planning), like birth control pills or an

intrauterine device (also called IUD), can keep from getting pregnant. If you're pregnant or thinking about getting pregnant, tell your health care provider right away about any drug or medicine you take. Your provider can make sure that what you're taking is safe for you and your baby. Your provider also can help you get treatment for using street drugs or abusing prescription drugs if you need it. If you abuse prescription drugs, it means you take more than has been prescribed for you, you take someone else's prescription drug, or you get the drug from someone without a prescription.

If you're not pregnant, quit using street drugs or abusing prescription drugs before you get pregnant. This is the best way to prevent NAS.