

# Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome

Family of drugs that is of growing concern is opioids. We are concerned about many drug exposures during pregnancy, it is the pregnant woman's long-term use of opioid medications that pose the greatest risk to the baby. This is a rapidly growing problem, and seems related to increasing use and abuse of prescription opioids in the general population.

Exposure to opioids brings a high risk of long-term effects and increases the need for treatment.

Common examples of opioids include:

- Oxycodone (Vicodin)
- Hydrocodone (Demerol)
- Morphine
- Oxycodone (Oxycontin)

## When is NAS diagnosed?

Early symptoms of NAS may present immediately after birth, or days or weeks later. The newborn exposed

to significant in utero opioid medications and delivered at Cape Coral Hospital, Gulf Coast Medical Center or HealthPark Medical Center are routinely hospitalized and monitored for signs of NAS for the first week of life.

We diagnose NAS using a highly validated and accepted screening system—called Finnegan Neonatal Abstinence Scoring Tool, or FNAST—that grades the severity of the withdrawal. The scoring system also helps determine treatment.

## How is NAS treated?

Initially, we treat the babies without medication. Instead, we employ supportive treatments that include:

- Avoidance of loud noises
- Frequent feedings and burpings
- Limited stimulation
- Providing a quiet, dimly-lit environment
- Rocking
- Swaddling

## What are the signs and symptoms of NAS?

The development of withdrawal symptoms depend on the medications or drugs that the baby was exposed to—some appear within hours, while others present days or weeks after birth. Examples of common symptoms include:

- Dehydration
- Diarrhea
- Fever
- High-pitched crying
- Inability to sleep or eat normally

- Increased muscle tone
- Irritability
- Respiratory distress
- Seizures
- Sweating
- Tremors
- Vomiting

**Each baby may experience symptoms differently, and symptoms may become more severe as the withdrawal progresses.**

When these strategies are unsuccessful—as determined by FNAST scoring—treatment moves to include medication.

Many babies diagnosed with NAS require medications to successfully treat their withdrawal. With medical treatment comes a longer term stay in the hospital. Some babies need three to five weeks in the hospital, while other babies exposed to multiple drugs may need six to eight weeks in the hospital to get adequate treatment.

## What are the long-term side effects of NAS?

Unfortunately, the long-term impact on the developing brain is not fully known. We do know that there is an increased risk for:

- Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder
- Learning disabilities
- Poor school performance
- Developmental delays
- Sudden infant death syndrome

We also know that mild symptoms of withdrawal may continue for months after discharge from the hospital.

## Is NAS preventable?

We have seen a substantial increase in the number of babies born with NAS. It is a preventable condition if mothers stop using drugs or taking prescription medication before they become pregnant.

If you are pregnant and using drugs or taking prescription medication, talk to your doctor right away to determine the best method for managing your pregnancy. It also is important to discuss all drug use with your doctor so a controlled treatment option can be determined.