



## Care of babies experiencing withdrawal symptoms

### Other formats

If you need this information in another format such as audio tape or computer disk, Braille, large print, high contrast, British Sign Language or translated into another language, please telephone the PALS desk on 01271 314090.

During pregnancy, almost every substance in your blood can pass to your baby. This means your baby shares the medication, drugs, alcohol and substances you take while you are pregnant. When your baby is born they are no longer exposed to the substance(s) and therefore can develop withdrawal symptoms. The medical name given to this group of symptoms is Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS).

Some of the substances that cause withdrawal or NAS include opioids, benzodiazepines, some antidepressants, illegal drugs and substitution drugs such as methadone and buprenorphine.

Please talk openly with your health care providers about the medications, drugs and other substances you are taking or have taken during your pregnancy, including:

Prescription medications

Over-the-counter medications

Street drugs

Herbal remedies

Alcohol

Cigarettes

Caffeine in drinks such as coffee, cola and energy drinks

The aim of this leaflet is to help parents recognise withdrawal symptoms in their baby and give guidance on how to help the withdrawal process.

Except in special circumstances you and your baby will go to post natal ward after delivery as normal. We will always aim to keep mothers and babies together. This will help you to get to know your baby and recognise the ways that you can comfort him or her.

The nurses and midwives acknowledge that this is a very stressful and emotional time. They will be there to support you and your baby through the withdrawal, helping you to go home as soon as possible. Please ask your nurse or midwife if there is anything they can do to help.

We may ask you to permit us to take a urine sample from your baby as soon as possible after delivery. This can help us to determine the level of substances they may have in their system and may help us decide the best way to help them. We are never able to predict how severe

Breastfeeding is always encouraged and helps you to bond with your baby. If you are considering breastfeeding, please discuss this with your midwife or nurse and we will be able to offer ongoing advice and support. Breastfeeding can help to alleviate some of the symptoms your baby may be having. It is important to remember that your current medications may continue to pass on into your breast milk and therefore it is important that we check that this is safe for your baby, your midwife or nurse can discuss this with you.

**Important notes:**

Some babies will withdraw immediately after birth and others could take days or weeks before withdrawal symptoms may occur.

Most women who use prescribed opioid drugs or substitution therapy (methadone) should be encouraged to breastfeed.

- Feeding difficulties due to sucking/coordination problems
- Frequent feeding
- Poor weight gain
- Vomiting/diarrhoea
- Increased breathing rate
- Irritability
- Wakefulness
- Fever
- Sneezing
- Stuffy nose
- Scratching

Below are some suggestions which may help you to comfort your baby. Please ask your midwife or nurse if you would like some help; they will be able to help you learn how to comfort your baby.

<p>Prolonged, high pitched cry, irritability.</p> <p>Not settling after a feed.</p>	<p>If possible, keep your baby in a quiet room with no bright lights or noise, and avoid excessive handling.</p> <p>Ask your nurse or midwife to help you learn how to swaddle your baby (this should only be done whilst you are in hospital) be careful that your baby does not become too warm.</p> <p>Non-nutritive sucking may help to settle your baby and this may be done by using a dummy. On most occasions we would advise that babies who are establishing breastfeeding do not have a dummy. We would recommend that you discuss using a dummy with your nurse if you are considering this.</p>
<p>Poor feeding or vomiting</p>	<p>Feed in quiet, calm environment with minimal noise and disturbance.</p> <p>Feed baby slowly, stop several times during a feed</p> <p>Feed baby small amounts more often. And allow time for resting between sucking. Clean any vomit from the skin.</p>

Sneezing, stuffy nose or breathing fast	<p>Avoid wrapping your baby too tightly.</p> <p>If you feel your baby may settle better prone, never leave them unsupervised. Nursing prone is linked to cot death. Do not let your baby overheat.</p>
Excessive sucking of fists	<p>Make sure that your baby is not hungry.</p> <p>Consider using scratch mitts if your baby is scratching their skin or has excoriated / sore skin around their face.</p>
Trembling or stiffness	<p>Handle your baby slowly and gently.</p> <p>Reduce light and noise.</p> <p>If you are concerned about your baby being stiff or having unusual movements, please consult a member of staff or doctor immediately.</p>
Sore bottom	<p>Use a barrier cream.</p>
Panicking when woken	<p>Approach baby quietly and calmly.</p>

If your baby is admitted to the SCU you will be encouraged to be with your baby and care for him/her in the same way as on the postnatal ward. The nurses on SCU will be able to give you more information about this if your baby requires admission.

Babies on medication will need to stay in hospital for at least a week, often longer, and will require follow up at the baby clinic.

If you would like to look around the SCU before delivery, please ask one of the midwives to arrange this for you.

If you are with your health visitor. If you require **IMMEDIATE MEDICAL HELP, DIAL 999**.  
medical help if your baby becomes unwell.

your

## References

National Health Service. (2018). Hepatitis B Vaccination. [Online] Available at:  
<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/vaccinations/hepatitis-b-vaccine/> [Accessed 2/3/19]

Northern Lincolnshire and Goole NHS Foundation Trust. (2018). Babies at Risk of Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS) Advice for Parents and Carers.

### **PALS**

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) ensures that the NHS listens to patients, relatives, carers

## Have your say

Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust aims to provide high quality services. However, please tell us when something could be improved. If you have a comment or compliment about a service or treatment, please raise your comments with a member of staff or the PALS team in the first instance.

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