

Newborn Withdrawal

Newborn Withdrawal

When a woman uses prescription pain medicines (narcotics) or illegal drugs during pregnancy, her baby will likely suffer from withdrawal. Another name for withdrawal is neonatal abstinence syndrome.

Symptoms may include poor feeding, vomiting, diarrhea, problems breathing, sweating, excessive crying or fussiness, and seizures.

How do You Know if Your Baby has Withdrawal?

Tell your health care team if you used prescription pain medicine or illegal drugs during your pregnancy.

Members of your health care team will test your baby's urine and meconium (newborn baby stool) after birth. They will watch your baby carefully for any signs of withdrawal.

There are special scoring systems your health care team will use to tell if your baby is going through withdrawal. Treatment will be based on those scores.

How Long Will it Take to Know if Your Baby is Going Through Withdrawal?

It depends on the type of drug taken during pregnancy. Some drugs leave the body in a short time and others take a longer time to leave the body.

Babies can show signs of withdrawal right after birth until up to 2 weeks after birth.

- If you used a short-acting narcotic, your baby will need to stay in the hospital for at least 4 days before going home.
- If you used methadone, your baby will need to stay in the hospital for at least 1 week.

How Do You Treat Withdrawal?

There are two ways the health care team can help your baby:

- The first involves no medicine. The health care team will help lower stress to your baby with gentle handling, noise control, swaddling and feedings on demand.
- The second involves medicine, such as morphine or methadone. This will depend on your baby's health and withdrawal symptoms.

Can You Breastfeed Your Baby?

Some babies will have less withdrawal with breastfeeding. It is important not to use drugs that may pass to your baby during breastfeeding. Please talk with your health care provider about whether you should breastfeed your baby.

(over)

How Long Will Your Baby Need to Stay in the Hospital?

It is impossible to know ahead of time how long your baby will need to stay in the hospital.

Babies born with withdrawal often have other medical problems. The most common is trouble eating. Some babies will need to stay in the hospital until they are completely off drugs and other babies may need more treatment after leaving the hospital.

Your health care team will decide how long your baby needs to stay in the hospital.