



BLUEWATER
HEALTH

**NEONATAL ABSTINENCE SYNDROME (NAS)
A GUIDE FOR CAREGIVERS WITH A NEWBORN
WITHDRAWING FROM DRUGS AND MEDICATIONS**

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Congratulations on the Birth of Your Baby!

Having a baby is an exciting time, and there is a lot to learn. Members of your baby's healthcare team will support and help you learn about how to care for your baby.

During pregnancy, your baby was exposed to methadone, a medication and/or other drugs that can cause withdrawal problems. This booklet will help you learn what to watch for and how to comfort your baby.

We are here to teach and support you in looking after your baby.

Remember

Your baby's healthcare team may consist of many people, such as doctors, nurses, social workers, pharmacists, public health nurses, child support workers from Children's Aid Society (CAS), and First Nations band representatives.

You and your baby are important members of the team.

What Drugs or Medications Is This Book about?

There are many types of drugs or medications we refer to in this book. Some may be legally prescribed by a healthcare professional and some may be obtained illegally. These may include narcotics such as morphine, oxycodone, methadone and percocet, as well as certain antidepressants and/or anti-anxiety medications. Other drugs may include cocaine, heroin and methamphetamines. Please remember that alcohol, marijuana, cigarettes, and some herbal remedies may also cause health problems for your baby

We understand each person takes medication or other substances for different reasons. We are here to support and care for you and your baby. To help your baby, it is important to be honest and give us accurate information about the substances you took during pregnancy.

If you are interested in entering a methadone program the social worker can give you information. Please speak with your social worker about this.

What Is Withdrawal?

Certain medications/drugs can cause a problem called *withdrawal* for your baby. When you took this type of medication/drug during pregnancy your baby also got this medication/drug. When your baby was born, they suddenly stopped getting this medication/drug. This sudden decrease in the amount of the medication/drug your baby was receiving during pregnancy may cause withdrawal.

Your baby needs to be watched for signs of withdrawal. The type of care your baby needs depends on the signs of withdrawal your baby has. **Try not to compare your baby's care with that of other babies.**



SECTION 1

GETTING STARTED

After Your Baby is Born

Immediately after birth, if your baby is well they should be placed on your bare chest, skin to skin and remain there for as long as possible. This skin-to-skin touch is calming to your baby and will help you to bond with your baby and be more successful with breastfeeding (if you choose to do so). In most cases, your baby will remain in your room with you and be monitored regularly by your nurse for signs of withdrawal.

Soon after birth, the nurse will use the Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome Scoring Tool to assess for signs of withdrawal in your baby. This tool helps us determine the severity of your baby's withdrawal symptoms. Your Pediatrician will use this score to determine if your baby will require medication to help control the withdrawal symptoms. Our goal is to keep your baby as comfortable as possible.

What Can You Do as a Parent?

A baby in withdrawal can be very sensitive to light, touch and sound. You can learn ways to help comfort and soothe your baby.

Speak softly around your baby and encourage your baby's visitors to speak softly as well. **Do not wake your baby when they are sleeping.**

Feed your baby when they are hungry. For most babies, breastfeeding is still the healthiest way to feed your baby.

Hold your baby when they are fussy. Your baby will be comforted by the sound of your voice and the smell of your skin. Cuddling your baby can help them feel in control of their movements. It also helps your baby feel loved and secure.

Members of your baby's healthcare team can give you more ideas on how you can comfort your baby. You can read more about ways to help your baby.

Learn about the Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome Scoring Tool so you can work with your nurse to accurately score your baby's withdrawal symptoms.

You will most likely be discharged before your baby is ready to go home. We cannot guarantee there will always be a room available; however we will make every effort to accommodate you to remain close to your baby throughout their stay.

If you have your own ideas about how you may help, please share them with us.

What Is Skin-to-skin Care?

This is a great way for you as parents to love and comfort your baby. You hold your baby against your bare skin, relax and enjoy time together. Skin-to-skin works best if the snuggle time is more than 30 minutes. Enjoy this time together.

To do skin-to-skin care, follow these steps:

- Wear a loose shirt that buttons up the front.
- Take off all of your baby's clothes only leaving the diaper on.
- Place your baby on your bare chest against your skin.
- Put one hand on your baby's back and use your other hand to support the head. Snuggle your baby in an upright position with their face turned to the side. Place a blanket over both of you for privacy if you wish.
- **Do not sleep with your baby skin to skin.**

What about Feeding My Baby?

Mothers are encouraged to breastfeed and we will provide you with help and support to do this. If breastfeeding is not an option for you and your baby, for whatever reason, please ask about skin-to-skin care as an excellent way to bond with your baby.

Breastfeeding may not be recommended as the use of some medications/drugs may cause harm to your baby. The healthcare team will discuss options available if you would like to breastfeed, which may include pumping your breasts and discarding the milk, until it is safe to feed your baby.

Breastfeeding can comfort your baby. It is very important to feed your baby frequently or empty your breasts by pumping often (every three hours) in the first few days, as this will help build a milk supply large enough to feed your baby.

If you are not able to stay with your baby, ask your nurse about pumping your breasts in your room or at home. You will be encouraged to pump at least eight times per day – including every three hours at night. This way your baby will benefit the most from the milk only you can provide.

Regardless of how you choose to feed your baby (breastfeed, pumped breast milk or formula), a baby in withdrawal will often need to eat more often and may have a difficult time feeding. Try to feed your baby in a quiet, dim environment with few distractions to help baby feel comfortable and calm.

Some babies experiencing withdrawal may have a frantic and unproductive suck. This may make it hard for your baby to feed properly at the breast or by bottle. Talk to your nurse about ways you may help your baby with feedings if this is the case.

What Are the Signs and Symptoms of Withdrawal?

These are different for each baby and may include:

- Irritability that causes lack of sleep or problems feeding;
- Stuffy nose and sneezing;
- Unexplained fever;
- Upset stomach with vomiting after some feeds;
- Diarrhea that can cause diaper rash;
- Weight loss or slow weight gain;
- Extreme hunger;
- Trembling or tremors – even when sleeping;
- Pain and discomfort;
- Hypersensitivity to touch;
- Sucking excessively on a soother;
- Increased crying or irritability; and
- Seizures.

When does withdrawal start?

Withdrawal may start in the first few days after birth. Every baby is different. Some babies start to show signs of withdrawal sooner while others may not show symptoms for a few days or weeks.

Babies experiencing withdrawal who require medication will stay in the Special Care Nursery for observation, treatment and care. The length of time depends on the type of medication/drug(s) a baby is withdrawing from and the type of treatment needed. Some babies need to stay for a few days and some stay for several weeks.

How long does withdrawal last?

The length of withdrawal is also different for each baby. Withdrawal may last anywhere from one week to eight weeks or longer.



SECTION 2

MEDICAL TREATMENT OF NAS

Calming Measures and Medication

If your baby's scores indicating withdrawal rise and remain high in spite of all the calming measures you and your medical team can provide, your baby may require medication to treat the withdrawal.

Your baby will be moved to the Special Care Nursery and cared for by specialized neonatal Registered Nurses (RNs) who have extra training in caring for babies in withdrawal. Your baby will be closely monitored and given just enough medication to make the symptoms from withdrawal less uncomfortable. This medication will be given by mouth around the clock every few hours until your baby shows signs of improvement.

Once your baby's withdrawal is improving, the dose will be very slowly decreased; this is called *weaning*. Every day your baby will be assessed by the doctor and nurses to decide if the medication should be weaned that day.

For your baby's safety, weaning is a slow process. It is important to be patient during this process. This may be an overwhelming and frustrating time, but everyone wants your baby to be better and to go home as soon as safely possible.

Talk to your healthcare team about your questions or frustrations, offer suggestions and be involved in the decisions made for your baby. We are a team.

The Special Care Nursery

The length of stay in the nursery is different for each baby. Your baby's stay will depend on the symptoms they may be having.

Members of your healthcare team are available at any time to talk to you about your baby's progress and to answer any questions you may have.

If you have gone home, and want to visit your baby you will need to refer to the visiting guidelines in place at the time. Your nurse can inform you of any changes as they happen. When visiting you may be asked to step out of the Nursery briefly or put on noise-cancelling headphones, during certain times to protect the privacy and confidentiality of other families in the Nursery. We will ask the same of those families for your baby.

If you are out of the hospital, you may call at any time to check on your baby. You will be asked to give an identification number for your baby's protection to verify that we are giving information to the correct family. This number is on your identification band that matches your baby's band. Please do not share this number with anyone who is not to receive health information about your baby.

Safe Sleep

Your baby's sleep environment is very important for the health and well-being of your baby, both in hospital and once you go home. Providing a safe sleep environment is one of the best ways to decrease the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome – or SIDS.

- Newborns should be placed to sleep on their backs on a firm mattress appropriate for a baby. Remember – **Back To Sleep**.
- There should be no loose blankets, toys or loose objects in your baby's bed. **Avoid any blankets that could end up covering the face.** A sleep sack is safest.
- Do not place your baby on pillows or cushions to sleep.
- Do not sleep with your baby in your bed, on your couch, or while holding your baby.
- Do not smoke around your baby. If you smoke, wash your hands and change your clothes after you smoke and before you hold your baby to reduce exposure to harmful second-hand smoke.
- Do not use drugs or alcohol while caring for your baby, as you may be more likely to fall asleep with the baby in your arms or roll onto the baby.
- Breastfeed your baby if your physician has agreed it is safe.

Occasionally for health reasons or to comfort your baby, your nurse may recommend an alternate sleeping position. Your baby's safety will be closely monitored if this occurs.

Babies experiencing withdrawal are often fussy when they are not swaddled in a blanket. Discuss this with your nurse and together you can explore safe options for keeping your baby calm. If your baby must be swaddled, do it in a way that prevents the blanket from possibly covering the face. Keep your baby's hands near their face so you can watch for feeding cues like rooting and sucking on the hands.

What Can You Do if You're Feeling Overwhelmed?

This can be a hard time for parents who are separated from their baby for any reason. Sometimes a baby in withdrawal can be fussy and hard to cuddle. Every baby is different and your baby may need different things at different times. Learning your baby's special body language and signals will make you feel more confident.

It is all right to ask your baby's nurse to take over. **Remember** to take breaks. This is a good time to accept help from friends and family who will be supporting you once you go home. Remember to follow public health guidelines when determining who your support people will be, to keep you and your baby safe. This help may include dropping off meals, rides to and from the hospital, running errands, and assisting with child care just to name a few.

Planning ahead may help make your baby's stay in hospital less stressful for you and your family. Ask for assistance from our team if you need extra support during your stay.

If you are feeling stressed, it may be helpful to talk to a support person. Our social worker is trained to support families going through this experience. Family support workers through the Children's Aid Society are also a great source of support for you by ensuring a safe plan of care as you bring your baby home.

Keeping Connected...

Your healthcare team will plan a meeting to discuss your unique needs and plans for discharge home. This plan will ensure you and your baby will be connected to the resources available in the community upon discharge. Ensuring a safe transition home and ongoing support for your family is a priority. You can also request a team meeting at any time by asking any member of your baby's healthcare team.

Bring a list of your questions, concerns and ideas so we can all make the best plan of care for you and your baby.

At Home

At home, continue to use gentle touch with your baby. Limit the number of caregivers and follow directions from public health to keep you and your baby safe. Offer a calm home environment. Loud noise and bright lights increase your baby's stress. Here are some ways to help offer a calm environment:

- Turn the TV, stereo or radio down or off.
- Ask people to talk quietly.
- Limit the number of caregivers around your baby.
- Decrease lighting overhead – back lighting from a floor lamp is preferred.
- Continue to promote a safe sleep environment, and avoid smoking around your baby.

An environment that is comfortable for an infant is also created by the soothing and calm presence of the caregiver. Routine is very important. The baby will respond more positively when caregivers use soft voices and speak and move slowly.

Community Resources

- Telehealth Ontario, 24/7 registered nurse access, 1 (866) 797-000
- Period of Purple Crying Video, bluewaterhealth.ca, Maternal/Infant/Child Program



- Smokers Helpline, 1 (866) 366-3667, SmokersHelpline.ca or text the word “Quit” to the number 123456.
- Healthy Babies Healthy Children, Public health nurse, (519) 383-8331
- Lactation public health nurse, (519) 383-8331 or www.lambtonhealth.on.ca
- Women’s Interval Home, if you are experiencing abuse, feel unsafe in your home or need emergency shelter, you may call the 24 hours crisis line (519) 336-5200 or <http://womensintervalhome.com>
- St. Clair Child and Youth, Postpartum blues/depression support, ask for the Postpartum Team, (519) 337-3701 or www.stclairchild.ca
- Sarnia Lambton Children’s Aid Society, (519) 336-0623 or www.slcas.on.ca
- Bluewater Methadone Clinic
 - Sarnia, (519) 337-5000
 - Chatham, (519) 351-5800
 - Wallaceburg, (519) 627-5800

<http://bluewatermethadoneclinic.ca>

Words of Wisdom from a Mom

“Remember you are your baby’s caregiver. You are the most important person in his/her life. Staff offer suggestions and provide healthcare for your baby, but he/she looks to you for comfort and love. Do not feel ashamed or embarrassed about your situation. Plenty of mothers go through what you are experiencing. Do your best and ask questions. Everyone wants what is best for your baby.”

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For information about Bluewater Health and our amenities, visit www.bluewaterhealth.ca or ask for a copy of our Patient & Family Guide.

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