

Patient Information Guide

What is NOWS?

Neonatal Opioid Withdrawal Syndrome (NOWS) is a condition that occurs in newborns who were exposed to opioids during pregnancy. When a pregnant person uses opioids, these substances can pass through the placenta to the developing baby, leading to dependency. After birth, the baby's body, now separated from the opioid supply, reacts with withdrawal symptoms. These symptoms can include irritability, tremors, difficulty feeding, vomiting, diarrhea, and more. Healthcare professionals closely monitor and provide specialized care to babies with NOWS to ensure their comfort and well-being as they gradually adjust to life without opioids.

Signs and Symptoms

The withdrawal signs a baby has depends on what drugs are in their system, how much they were exposed to, and how they were used during pregnancy.

Typical signs of withdrawal may include:

high-pitched cry	throwing up	severe diaper rash
shaky (tremors)	(vomiting)	stuffy nose or
cranky, restless	little weight gain	repeated sneezing
hard to get or keep	feeding problems	dehydrated
asleep	diarrhea or	forceful sucking
stiff body	frequent stools	skin irritation
fever	sweating	frequent yawning
		seizures (rare)

Treatment

Some babies have mild signs of withdrawal and need only normal, newborn baby care. Non-medical treatment is preferred. However, some babies have severe withdrawal and need medical treatment. Treatment may include being admitted to a special care nursery. There, your baby can get medicine to help ease their distress. If your baby is in a special care nursery, providers will be watching them to decide what care they need.

Things You Can Do to Comfort Your Baby

- Give your baby a pacifier.
- Pat or rock your baby.
- Hold your baby close. You might try using a skin-to-skin method called kangaroo care (pictured).
- Learn the signs of withdrawal so you will know if your baby is getting worse.
- Change your baby's diaper often. Clean their skin with warm water.
- Give smaller, more frequent feedings.
- Spend a lot of time with your baby, in the nursery or at home. Your baby will be comforted by your contact.
- Keep the setting calm and quiet. Keep lights dim, TV and radio off and use soft, quiet voices. Babies that have NOWS, are sensitive to stimulation, like bright light, loud sounds and being moved or held often.
- Use a blanket to wrap your baby, but be careful not to overheat them.



Medicine

Your baby's health care provider may prescribe medicine to help with their withdrawal.

- Give your baby the exact dose of medicine prescribed. Give only the amount of medicine that the health care provider prescribes.
- If you forget a dose of medicine, but remember within about an hour, give it right away. Then, go back to your regular dosing schedule.
- If you do not remember until later, do not give the missed dose at all. Do not double the next one. Instead, go back to your regular dosing schedule.



Neonatal Opioid Withdrawal Syndrome (NOWS)

Diet

Breastfeeding/chestfeeding is encouraged for patients who are on stable regimens of buprenorphine or methadone, or patients who are not taking opioids. Your healthcare provider will confirm whether or not breastfeeding/chestfeeding is safe for you and your baby based on your current medication regimen. However, if you are not breastfeeding/chestfeeding, your baby's health care provider will tell you what formula is best. Often, babies will need to suck but not eat. In that case, you can give them a pacifier. During the first week of life, a baby will eat 1/2 to 1 ounce of milk per feeding. After that, they will usually eat 2 to 3 ounces of milk per feeding. Feeding more than this can lead to vomiting and diarrhea.

Follow-up

It is important to watch your baby's development as they grow. Talk to your baby's health care provider about any questions or concerns you have. Children who have been treated for NOWS in a special care or intensive care nursery may need ongoing specialized care. A pediatrician will screen your baby to make sure they are developing normally.

When to Call Your Healthcare Provider

Call your baby's health care provider if you notice your baby:

- having worsening signs of withdrawal
- not eating
- having diarrhea or vomiting
- cannot be calmed down

When to Call 911

Call 911 for emergency help if your baby:

- has a seizure
- turns blue
- stops breathing