

# Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome

**Definition:** Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome, also called NAS, occurs when a pregnant woman takes a drug or medication that causes the unborn baby to become drug dependent before it is born. After birth, the baby may go through withdrawal when s/he stops receiving the medication through the placenta. Withdrawal symptoms vary from mild to severe and can include excessive crying, tremors, vomiting, diarrhea, trouble sleeping and stuffy nose or sneezing.

**How Common is NAS?** In the United States, there has been a 3-fold increase in the number of babies diagnosed with NAS over the past 10 years. In Connecticut we have seen a 2.7 fold increase. In 2011, 37,280 babies were born in Connecticut and 337 babies were diagnosed with NAS. In comparison, of the 41,996 babies born in 2002, 136 were diagnosed with NAS. \*

**Who is at Risk?** Some pregnant women must take medications to treat health conditions such as asthma, high blood pressure or depression. The medication may be necessary to stay healthy during pregnancy. There are also women who are addicted to prescription medications, such as opioid pain relievers, and illicit drugs that cause dependence in the unborn child. Prescription, over-the-counter and illicit medications can all have an effect on the unborn child. It is important for a woman to discuss **all** medications that she is taking with her healthcare provider, especially **before** becoming pregnant.

**Traditional Treatment:** The baby with NAS may receive a medicine that's similar to the drug s/he was exposed to before birth. This can help relieve the baby's withdrawal symptoms. Once these symptoms are under control, the baby gets smaller doses of the medicine over time so her body can adjust to being off the medicine. This is called pharmacotherapy. This leads to a much longer hospital stay, while the baby gradually withdraws, which can make it difficult for mother and baby to form a strong bond.

**Supportive Treatment:** Family members can play a very important role in an infant's recovery. New moms have the ability to help their babies recover from NAS. Two of the most important things these babies need is breast milk and close skin-to-skin contact. Quiet time together help mother and child heal and bond. Low lighting, slow, gentle handling and close swaddling may also help the infant recover. The baby with NAS needs small, frequent meals and lots of sleep.



**Resources:** There are many online resources for more information on NAS.

<http://www.cdc.gov/pregnancy/meds/>  
<http://www.nlm.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/007313.htm>  
<http://www.astho.org/Prevention/NAS-Neonatal-Abstinence-Report/>

Webinar for anyone wanting more current, in-depth information:  
View under Archived Webinars

[http://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/MaternalInfantHealth/PQC\\_Webinars.html](http://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/MaternalInfantHealth/PQC_Webinars.html)

**Source:** CT State Health Assessment, 2014

[http://www.ct.gov/dph/lib/dph/state\\_health\\_planning/sha-ship/hct2020/hct2020\\_state\\_hlth\\_assmt\\_032514.pdf](http://www.ct.gov/dph/lib/dph/state_health_planning/sha-ship/hct2020/hct2020_state_hlth_assmt_032514.pdf)

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