

# Neonatal Opioid Withdrawal Syndrome

**A Guide for Families**



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## **A new baby!**

Your team is committed to providing you and your baby with the best care possible. The information in this guide will help you learn how to care for you and your baby after birth.



# What is Neonatal Opioid Withdrawal Syndrome (NOWS)?

NOWS, or Neonatal Opioid Withdrawal Syndrome, occurs when a baby shows signs of withdrawal from opioids after birth. It is also sometimes called Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS).

## When might my baby show signs of NOWS?

Most babies show signs of withdrawal 2 to 3 days after birth, but some may not show signs until day 4 or 5.

It's hard to know which babies will have NOWS. Some babies will show signs even though their mothers only took small doses of medicines for a brief time during pregnancy. This guide was written to help you learn about NOWS and how to best support your new baby.



## What are some possible signs of NOWS?

- \* Not eating well or problems sucking
- \* Stiff arms, legs, and/or back
- \* Trouble sleeping
- \* Shaking, jitters, or lots of sucking
- \* High-pitched cries or fussiness; unable to be consoled
- \* Poor weight gain after a few days of life
- \* Irritation in diaper area due to loose, watery or frequent stools

## What will happen if my baby shows signs of NOWS?

Beginning soon after your baby's birth, nurses will monitor your baby for possible signs of withdrawal. This is done to help doctors decide which types of treatment your baby needs to feel better. The nurses will explain the signs and monitoring to you. You can help by sharing with your nurse how well your baby eats and sleeps and how easily they are consoled or calmed. If something is not clear, please ask for more information until your questions are answered!

# Treatment for Babies with NOWS—Supportive Care

If your baby is showing signs of withdrawal, love is some of the best medicine. The combination of cuddling and holding your baby close and, in some cases, medicine, can help your baby.

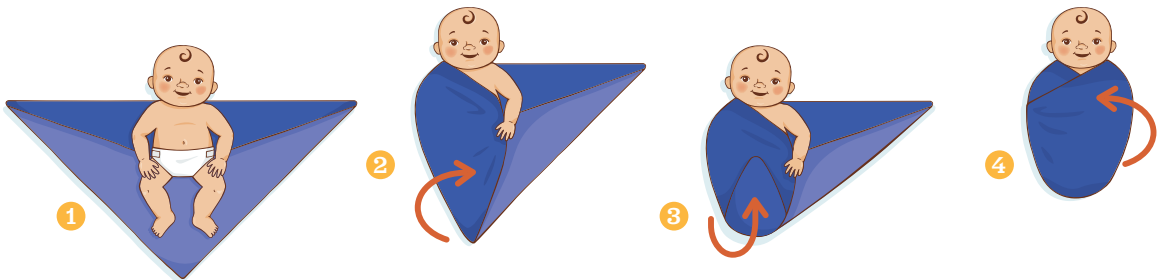


## How can I help my baby?

Whether or not your baby needs medicine, you can help your baby by:

- \* Breastfeeding is recommended for most babies with NOWS and may help with symptoms
- \* Keeping quiet and calm around your baby (few visitors, no noise, no bright lights)
- \* Feeding your baby whenever he or she looks hungry
- \* Staying close or rooming-in with your baby
- \* Having skin-to-skin contact with your baby
- \* Continually holding or swaddling your baby

## How to swaddle your baby







### Will my baby need medicine to get better?

If your baby has signs of withdrawal that are difficult to help with your loving care, your doctor may give him or her medicine. The medicines that babies with NOWS are given most often are morphine, methadone or buprenorphine (Subutex). Sometimes other medicines may be added to help your baby during this time. Your doctor or nurse can explain your baby's medication in more detail.

### How long will my baby need treatment?

Treatment for NOWS symptoms can range from a few days to a few weeks. It is hard to know how long it will last. Some babies who require medication for NOWS only need a few doses and others may need it for a few weeks. Every baby is different.

### When can my baby leave the hospital?

Your baby's care team will be able to help decide when they can be discharged. Generally, babies with NOWS can be discharged home:

- \* when they are gaining weight/ aren't losing too much weight
- \* when they are eating and sleeping well
- \* when they are able to be easily consoled or calmed
- \* when they no longer require medication

Remember,  
every baby  
is different!

# What to Expect When Your Baby Leaves the Hospital

It is important to share any concerns you have with your baby's doctor and/or nurse. They are eager to partner with you and want the same outcomes as you: a happy healthy baby and mom! Remember YOU are the number one treatment for your baby!

## When baby comes home, the journey continues

**Remember, babies cry a lot and babies with NOWS may cry more often and easily.**

Helping yourself and managing your stress will help you care for your baby.

- \* Settle into a quiet, low-lit room to feed your baby
- \* Keep things calm and quiet around your baby
- \* Swaddle, gently rock or sway, or provide skin-to-skin contact with your baby
- \* Talk to your baby softly and gently
- \* Never shake your baby or put anything over your baby's face to quiet your baby
- \* If you feel upset, walk away and take deep breaths for a few minutes



**Make certain to take advantage of Ohio's Early Intervention Services (<https://ohioearlyintervention.org/>) or ask your provider. They will work closely with you to support your baby's development as they continue to grow.**

# Ways to Support and Care for Your Baby

Parents and caregivers of a baby with NOWS can help their baby get better.

## Here are some things you can do:

- \* Make your baby comfortable by setting up a routine, letting few people visit, talking softly, keeping the room quiet and dim (turn off the TV or radio, turn your phone down or off, and turn down the lights).
- \* Let your baby sleep as long as needed and without being woken up suddenly.
- \* Make feeding time quiet and calm, and burp your baby often.
- \* Learn to spot your baby's "I am upset" signs, whether he or she is yawning, sneezing, shaking, crying, or frowning. Also know the signs that say your baby is happy, hungry, or relaxed.
- \* When your baby is upset, hold them skin-to-skin or swaddle him or her in a blanket on your chest. Let your baby calm down before trying anything new, or gently sway or rock your baby.
- \* Gently and slowly introduce new things to your baby one at a time.
- \* As your baby becomes calmer for longer periods of time, start checking to see if he or she might like to have the blanket wrapped more loosely or taken off sometimes.

Remember,  
**YOU** are the  
number one  
treatment for  
your baby!







## **Taking care of yourself helps you take better care of your baby**

- \* Take care of yourself—take breaks, ask others for help sometimes—so you can be there when your baby really needs you.
- \* If you are in a substance treatment program, continue as long as your doctor recommends.
- \* Learn to spot your baby's needs and continue to provide lots of love.
- \* Follow all of the doctor's directions for taking care of your baby and yourself.
- \* Call a family member, friend, or your baby's doctor or nurse if you feel upset, angry, scared, or just need help. Everyone needs help sometimes.

# Reflections

**What I love best about my baby:**

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**My baby has the most wonderful:**

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**The most joyful experience of having my baby has been:**

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# Self-Reflections

**I am proud of myself for:**

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**When I get stressed or overwhelmed, it is helpful for me to:**

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**My strengths include:**

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**My favorite mantra or self affirmation is:**

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Taking care of your baby also means taking care of yourself, from following your doctor's recommendations to continuing your treatment plan. Please remember, we are here to help you and your family!



## You play an important role in helping your baby.

Pay attention to your baby's needs. Helping your baby stay calm and comfortable is some of the best "medicine" you can give. If you have any questions, please ask your doctor or nurse. They want the same outcomes as you: a happy, healthy baby...and mom!

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**Ohio**

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Medicaid**