



London Health Sciences Centre

Patient Information

CARING FOR YOUR BABY DURING WITHDRAWAL

WHAT IS WITHDRAWAL?

Babies who have been exposed to certain medications and/or substances before they were born may show signs of withdrawal. Withdrawal happens when the baby's system is no longer receiving the medication or substance he or she is used to. Some babies may never show any signs, others will show some signs, and others will show many signs. Babies who show signs of withdrawal will be assessed often while they stay with you. If a baby shows severe signs of withdrawal they will need to be monitored in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU), where they can receive medication as part of their care. Signs of withdrawal may occur within a few hours of birth, or even days or weeks later.

How will my baby be monitored?

The nurses will use a scoring system that helps them identify when your baby's withdrawal is severe enough to need intervention. This scoring system also helps them to know when your baby may need more help with comfort measures such as holding and rocking.

What can I do for my baby during this time of withdrawal?

Research has indicated that if baby's withdrawal is not severe, the best place for him or her is with you, the parent. Providing the following comfort measures will help your baby to cope with the challenges of withdrawal.

SECURITY

- ▶ *Skin to skin contact!!*
- ▶ Wrap baby snugly in soft blanket
- ▶ Hold baby frequently, gently but firmly
- ▶ Remember to always have baby on his or her back to sleep

DECREASE STIMULATION

- ▶ Keep lights low
- ▶ Keep noise level low (visitors not speaking loudly around baby)
- ▶ Avoid bouncing/rapid patting and movements
- ▶ Keep visitors to a minimum
- ▶ Avoid passing baby around to be held by visitors



**Skin to skin contact
("Kangaroo Care")**

SOOTHE / RELAX

- ▶ Play soft, soothing music
- ▶ Rock gently
- ▶ Speak softly
- ▶ Feed infant frequently to ease abdominal pain and give extra calories
- ▶ Use a pacifier (between feedings)
- ▶ Use soft blankets on bed to prevent scrapes and rub marks

Can I breastfeed?

Breastfeeding is usually safe and recommended because of its many benefits even when you are still taking medication or the substance the baby is withdrawing from. The symptoms of withdrawal can be reduced when an infant is breastfed because the baby is still receiving small amounts of the medication or substance. Talk to your health care provider about whether breastfeeding will be a good idea for you and your baby. Lactation consultants can also be helpful and are available to assist you.

Breastfeeding is recommended for the first 6 months of life. If for any reason, you decide to begin to wean your baby, remember to watch for signs and symptoms of withdrawal. Seek assistance from your health care provider with any concerns.

When I go home from the hospital what should I watch for?

- ▶ Refer to “Warning Signs for Baby” on discharge instruction sheet
- ▶ Signs and Symptoms of withdrawal:
 - High-pitched crying that is excessive compared to your baby’s normal behavior
 - Poor feeding
 - Sleeping for short periods of time, waking often
 - Frequent yawning and/or sneezing (more than 3-4 in a row)
 - Vomiting and/or diarrhea
 - Fever and/or sweating (temperature greater than 37.5° C or 100° F in baby’s armpit)
- ▶ Get medical attention right away if your baby:
 - Does not respond to comforting, i.e. Baby is crying for long periods of time then was previously normal for him/her and does not stop with comfort measures
 - Has vomiting or diarrhea
 - Is feeding poorly (not having required pees and poops)
 - Has a fever that does not resolve when undressed (greater than 37.5° C or 99.5° F in baby’s armpit)

Who do I go to for help?

- ▶ Your health care provider: Family physician/paediatrician/midwife
- ▶ Pediatric Emergency Department at Victoria Hospital
- ▶ Closest community hospital

*Inform the health care providers what medications and/or substances you were taking prior to birth and now. This is so they can give your baby the most appropriate care.

Sometimes, these signs and symptoms can be related to an infection rather than withdrawal, so it is important to have your baby checked.

Wang, S., Ordean, A. & Kahan, M.(2011). Substance use in pregnancy. *Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists*, 33(4), 367-384.
ACoRN Neonatal Society. (2005). *ACoRN: Acute care of the at risk new born*. Vancouver: ACoRN Neonatal Society.