

What is NAS?

Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS) is a group of symptoms that some babies experience **after birth** if they were exposed to **opioids or other substances** during pregnancy.

When a baby is in the womb, they receive drugs (like heroin, methadone, codeine, or oxycodone) through the placenta. After birth, the baby is suddenly cut off from those substances—and their little body may go into **withdrawal** as it adjusts.

Common Substances Linked to NAS

- **Opioids** (e.g., heroin, methadone, buprenorphine, codeine, oxycodone)
- Sometimes: **benzodiazepines, alcohol, antidepressants, or stimulants**
- Babies exposed to **multiple substances** may show more severe symptoms

Signs of NAS

Not all babies show symptoms, but common signs include:

System Affected	Possible Symptoms
CNS (nervous system)	Tremors, high-pitched cry, irritability, trouble sleeping
Feeding	Poor suck, vomiting, slow weight gain
Digestive	Loose stools, dehydration
Autonomic	Sweating, sneezing, fever
Other	Stiff or floppy tone, frequent yawning or hiccups

 Symptoms usually appear **within 24–72 hours** of birth, but can be delayed for up to a week or more.

How is NAS Treated?

- **Comfort-based care** is always the first step: holding, swaddling, skin-to-skin, quiet rooms


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- Some babies need **medications** (like morphine or clonidine) to manage withdrawal
 - Babies are usually monitored in hospital for **5–7 days or longer**, depending on severity
 - The **Finnegan scoring tool** is often used by medical staff to track symptoms
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What Carers Can Do

- Follow the baby's care plan and attend medical appointments
 - Use **gentle, consistent routines**—quiet, dark rooms, slow transitions, soft voices
 - Try soothing strategies: **swaddling, skin-to-skin, rocking, white noise**
 - Be patient—withdrawal symptoms can take weeks to settle
 - **Document behaviours** (feeding, sleep, crying) to help professionals monitor progress
 - Ask for help: your child health nurse, caseworker, or paediatrician can support you
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Important to Know

- NAS is **not the baby's fault**—it's a medical condition caused by substance exposure
 - These babies are **not “addicted”**—they are withdrawing from substances
 - With the right care, love, and early intervention, babies with NAS can thrive
 - Your **calm, responsive care** plays a huge role in their healing
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 ***You don't have to be perfect—just present, consistent, and kind. That's what these babies need most.***

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