Discharge

NAS treatment often occurs when a baby is still in the hospital after birth, but babies can also be admitted to the hospital for treatment if problems become worse after they are discharged home. Due to the continued possibility of withdrawal beyond the first few days of life, you will be instructed on how to monitor for signs of withdrawal and should contact your pediatrician if any of these symptoms are noted. Some babies with NAS can be irritable for months, but symptoms gradually improve with time.

If you have any questions, please ask your baby’s nurse or physician.
If you have received this brochure, it is because your baby may be at risk of developing drug withdrawal symptoms after birth. While we know this can be difficult news for a family to learn, rest assured that we will do everything in our power to get your baby healthy and discharged home as soon as possible.

What Is Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS)?
During pregnancy, most drugs that the mother takes cross the placenta and enter the baby’s bloodstream. When the baby is born he or she is no longer exposed to the medication taken by the mother, but may still be dependent on the drug. This can lead to the baby developing withdrawal symptoms known as Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS).
NAS occurs most commonly in babies born to women who are dependent on opioid medications (OxyContin®, Percocet®, Methadone®, Subutex®, etc.) however, significant symptoms may also occur in babies exposed to other medications, such as barbiturates and antidepressants.
It is not possible to predict which babies will develop NAS, and the symptoms may occur even when the mother is on a low dose of medication.

Care After Birth
After delivery, your baby will be taken with you to the mother/baby unit for routine care, unless there are other medical reasons for admission to the special care nursery (SCN) or neonatal intensive care unit (NICU).
All babies at risk of NAS will be observed for a minimum of 72 hours for signs of withdrawal. If you had a vaginal delivery, you may be discharged before your baby.

Evaluation
Most babies show signs of withdrawal within 24–72 hours. The nursing staff will use an NAS scoring chart to evaluate the baby for any signs of withdrawal. This scoring chart assigns points based on each symptom and its severity. Babies with elevated scores will be evaluated by a physician or nurse practitioner to determine if treatment is needed. Babies that require treatment for NAS will be admitted to the SCN, NICU or pediatric unit.

Treatment
Medication such as morphine may be given to decrease the baby’s NAS symptoms and reduce the possibility of seizures. The dose will need to be adjusted up or down depending on how the baby responds.
As the NAS scores improve, the medication can be decreased. The process of assessing and decreasing the medication dose continues until the baby has scores low enough to stop all medications. Each baby is different in how they respond to being weaned off the medication.

Length of Stay
NAS can last from one to eight weeks or longer, depending on the baby. Babies on medication will need to stay in the hospital until their symptoms improve. Babies are not discharged home on medication.
If your baby requires a hospital stay for medication, it can be a very stressful and emotional time for you and your family. We encourage you to be a partner in the care of your baby while he or she is in the hospital. Our goal is to help you and your baby through this time and discharge your child as soon as possible.

Signs of Withdrawal
- High-pitched cry
- Excessive crying
- Tremors/jitteriness
- Sleeping difficulties
- Stuffy nose
- Sneezing
- Feeding difficulties
- Increased tone
- Vomiting/diarrhea
- Fast breathing
- Skin irritation
- Fever
- Sweating
- Seizure (rare)

The Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia is ranked among the best in the nation for care of preemies and babies born with medical complications by Parents magazine.