DRUGS, MEDICATIONS AND YOUR BABY

What to expect with a new baby who may be in withdrawal from drugs or medications

Adapted from the Maine Department of Health and Human Service, Maine CDC, Division of Population Health
What to expect before you have your baby

Your health care providers will ask questions to help you have a healthy baby. Please be honest with them. Let your health care providers know about all drugs and medications you are using.

It is hard to tell before birth how your baby will be affected by the drugs or medications you are using. Just remember, everything you eat or put in your body while you are pregnant can affect your growing baby. If your baby is exposed to drugs or certain medications during your pregnancy, there can be life-long effects including:

- Miscarriage
- Premature birth (born too soon)
- Low birth weight
- Brain damage
- Birth defects
- Problems learning
- Behavioral problems
- Withdrawal symptoms

While some prescribed medications may cause withdrawal symptoms in your baby, you may need them for a medical reason. If your health care provider agrees, continue to take the medication — your baby needs a healthy mom.
Care in the hospital

We will care for you and your baby the same way we care for any other new mom and baby. If your baby is doing okay, your baby may be able to stay in the room with you. Sometimes the baby needs to be watched more closely in the nursery. We want you to be able to care for your baby in the hospital as much as possible.

Will your baby have drug or medication withdrawal?

If you used drugs or medications such as Suboxone, methadone, OxyContin, Vicodin, heroin or codeine during your pregnancy, your baby may have complications after birth including withdrawal.

Babies in withdrawal usually show symptoms within 24 to 72 hours after birth, but withdrawal symptoms can appear as late as five to seven days after birth.

Possible signs of withdrawal include:

- High-pitched cry
- Tremors/jitters
- Stuffy nose, sneezing
- Hiccups
- Hard time sucking and swallowing
- Poor weight gain
- Jaundice (yellow skin)
- Fast breathing
- Irritability or fussiness
- Trouble sleeping
- Tight muscles, stiff arms and legs
- Vomiting, diarrhea
- Skin irritation
- Hyperactive reflexes (very big response to being startled)
- Possible seizures

How long can the signs and symptoms of withdrawal last?

Your baby may be watched in the hospital for several days or sometimes longer. This will depend on how severe the withdrawal symptoms are. If your baby has severe symptoms, your baby may need to stay in the hospital for up to two weeks or be sent to another hospital. All babies are different but sometimes babies need medication or treatment such as oxygen to help with the symptoms of withdrawal. Also, some babies need treatment even after they have gone home.

Will your baby be tested for drugs or medications?

If you used drugs or certain medications during your pregnancy your baby will have their urine (pee), first bowel movement (poop) and/or umbilical cord sample sent to the lab for testing after birth. It may take several days to get results from these tests. Your baby’s health care provider will talk with you about the results.
Safe breastfeeding (nursing)
Breastfeeding is an excellent way for you to feed and bond with your baby. But there are some situations when breastfeeding may be harmful to your baby. Some drugs can get into your baby’s bloodstream through your breast milk. Often they can be stronger in your breast milk than they are in your body. If drugs or medications were used during your pregnancy, talk with your health care provider about whether it is safe to breastfeed. They may also recommend a lactation consultant/specialist (someone who is specially trained in breast feeding) to help you.

Weight gain
Most babies will lose some weight after birth. We expect babies to be back to their birth weight in two weeks from the time they are born. However, babies in withdrawal may lose more weight and have a hard time putting the weight back on. We will watch to see how your baby is feeding and check the baby’s weight every day.

Other things to expect while in the hospital
While you are in the hospital, someone from the hospital’s social work department may come and talk with you to help in your transition to go back home. They may also recommend child development services to help your baby grow healthy and strong. Some drugs may cause problems with learning and behavior as your baby grows. Your baby’s health care provider can help you find the right services.

Caring for your baby at home
Once you are home, your baby may have mild signs of withdrawal for weeks or even months. The symptoms slowly become less severe over time. This can be a stressful time as a baby in withdrawal may be more irritable and have a hard time feeding and sleeping.

If you are feeling stressed, please ask for help right away. Call a friend or relative, or call your baby’s health care provider. (Also see the list of services at the end of this booklet.)

Feeding
Try to have a regular schedule for feeding. A schedule will help you keep track of how much your baby is eating every day. Breast-fed babies eat about every one and a half to three hours. Bottle-fed babies eat about every two and a half to four hours. Your baby may need a higher calorie formula. Your baby’s health care provider will help decide how many calories are best for your baby.

Your baby may be hungry but may have difficulty eating because of problems with sucking and swallowing. Be patient and try to think ahead about what your baby will need. Make sure to hold your baby when feeding. If your baby is having trouble eating or is not gaining weight, call your baby’s health care provider right away. Babies who do not eat well can get sick very quickly.

The Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) is notified when babies are born with drugs or certain medications in their bodies. If DHS contacts you, they will help you get services to help you and your baby get off to a good start.
Sleeping
For the first two months, babies usually sleep 16 to 20 hours a day. Usually after two months, babies need less sleep and are more awake. However, for babies born with drugs in their bodies, it may take six to nine months for them to have a good sleep schedule.

Some ways to help your baby sleep better:
- A dark and quiet room
- Calm, gentle touching
- Place your baby on his/her back in a crib to sleep, not in a shared bed
- A pacifier might provide some soothing while falling asleep
- A bedtime routine such as reading a story, singing a lullaby or playing soft music
- Babies usually only need one more layer than you have on in order to keep warm
- Plan diaper changes and other care around feeding times

Comforting your baby
Crying is your baby’s way of talking to you. Some babies cry more than others. Babies in withdrawal are very sensitive to the sounds, lights and activities around them. Try to keep very calm around your baby and limit the amount of stimulation. It is best to comfort a baby in withdrawal earlier, rather than later—do not let them “cry it out.” Loud noises and lots of activity can slow recovery. It is best to limit the number of people caring for your baby if possible.

If your baby is crying, try to find out why.
- Does your baby’s diaper need to be changed?
- Is your baby hungry or need to burp?
- Are there bright lights or loud sounds?
- Has your baby been in the same position for a long time?
- Does your baby need to sleep?
- Is your baby too warm or too cold?

You can also help comfort your baby by:
- Holding them and having skin-to-skin contact
- Rocking them gently (gentle up and down rocking is better than side to side rocking)
- Wrapping your baby in a blanket, to help them feel secure (swaddling)
- Giving them a pacifier

If your baby is crying more than you think is normal, please call your baby’s health care provider. This could be a sign that something is wrong. Your health care provider may be able to suggest some ways to help. Do not let yourself get too upset by the crying before you ask for help. NEVER shake your baby. Shaking your baby can cause permanent brain damage.
Resources for new parents

For postpartum depression
Well Mama,
Benton, Lincoln and Linn Counties: 541-231-4343

Postpartum Support International:
1-800-944-4PPD (or 1-800-944-4773)

For parenting or emotional support
Hope for Mothers:
Albany 541-812-4475
Lebanon 541-451-7872

Family Tree Relief Nursery (Linn County):
541-926-1091

Old Mill Relief Nursery (Benton County):
541-757-8068

Lincoln County Health Department:
541-754-5960

University of Maryland Medical Center Video:
https://vimeo.com/101299947

For domestic violence or help staying safe
Center Against Rape and Domestic Violence
Linn and Benton Counties: 541-754-0110, or 1-800-927-0197

My Sister's Place
Lincoln County: 541-994-5959

Mental health and crisis information
Benton County Crisis Line:
1-888-232-7192

Linn County Crisis Line:
541-967-3866 or 1-800-304-7468

Lincoln County Crisis Line:
1-866-266-0288

Dial 211
Learn more about community resources available in your area:

- Family resources
- Housing, food and energy
- Economic opportunity
- Health care

Visit: www.211info.org;
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