



What is Neonatal Opioid Withdrawal Syndrome (NOWS)?

Neonatal Opioid Withdrawal Syndrome (NOWS), formerly called Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome, is a group of withdrawal symptoms that can affect newborns exposed to legal, prescribed and/or illicit substances during pregnancy.

These substances include:

- Some antidepressants
- Tobacco
- Alcohol
- Benzodiazepines, barbiturates
- Methamphetamine
- Opiates-methadone, Subutex, suboxone, oxycodone, hydrocodone, morphine, codeine, heroin and fentanyl.

Symptoms can vary greatly from baby to baby. For most, symptoms begin within 24 to 96 hours. Neonatal Opioid Withdrawal Syndrome (NOWS) may take longer to appear. This is why babies stay in the hospital for a minimum of four days after delivery to observe and promote the safest transition.

“Eat, Sleep, Console” (ESC)

“Eat, Sleep, Console” is a tool established to help families and their health care team collaboratively care for newborns with NOWS after birth by keeping families roomed together and monitoring three key things:

- **Eating** - how well and often baby eats
- **Sleeping** - how long and well baby sleeps
- **Consoling** - how well baby calms down with support.

[More about ESC for families](#) 



Working Together

Keeping families together in the hospital is the best way to promote bonding and support babies experiencing NOWS. To provide the best care for these babies, families and the health care teams work together. There are many ways to comfort babies without medication, like skin-to-skin, swaddling, pacifier/sucking, low lighting, low noise, limiting visitors and keeping a calm environment. The health care team should help support the family with this and provide assistance, if needed.



Promoting Families

This can be a challenging time for babies and families. The goal is always to support the family as a unit throughout this transition. This works best with open communication and shared decision making to figure out the best plan for care. For many babies, the ESC program may be the most beneficial way to manage their symptoms.

In the event that a baby requires additional support and is not effectively eating, sleeping or consoling, treatment options should be discussed between the family and health care team. Some babies may benefit from a small amount of oral medication while they remain in the room. If further treatment is needed, the baby may be moved to the nursery, but continued family presence is always encouraged and supported.

More information on Neonatal Opioid Withdrawal Syndrome (NOWS)



Eat, Sleep, Console (ESC)

Promoting family-centered care in the management of Neonatal Opioid Withdrawal Syndrome (NOWS)