Comfort Care for a Baby with Drug Withdrawal

When a baby has signs of drug withdrawal, comfort care may be used by itself or with medicines. Your baby’s doctor or nurse will help you with these care methods until you feel comfortable doing them.

Your baby will tell you by his or her behavior what works best. Listen to your baby’s behavior cues for giving comfort.

To Keep Baby Comfortable

- Handle your baby gently. Avoid sudden movements that can upset him or her. Begin touch in less sensitive areas, such as the arms and legs. Start with the legs moving toward the feet. Add more touch, massage, or rocking motion if your baby has a positive response.

- Use skin to skin touch with your baby cuddled on your bare chest, also called kangaroo care. This will help with parent-baby bonding and increase your baby’s feelings of security.

- Help your baby feel secure. Try swaddling in blankets or “nest” of blankets for comfort. Give support to the back, neck and head.

- Keep the area near your baby calm. Use a soft touch and soft voice when talking. Reduce noise and activity. Keep lights low. Introduce lights and sounds slowly over time to see how your baby responds.

- Allow your baby to set the pace for interaction. Watch your baby’s cues closely to add or reduce stimuli before your baby cries. Your baby may show more yawning, hiccups, sneezing movement or looking away as cues to reduce activity.
To Help with Feedings

Some babies may have trouble eating because of an uncoordinated sucking reflex, or drooling while feeding. Use these tips when feeding your baby:

• Some babies in withdrawal lose more weight at first and gain weight back more slowly. This can be from frequent loose stools or drooling with feedings and the uncoordinated and exaggerated suck.

• Your baby may find comfort sucking on a pacifier. This need is different from the need for food. Your baby may have the urge to suck the pacifier non-stop or think he/she needs to eat more frequently than he/she should.

• Learn your baby’s cues for hunger and do not over feed your baby. You may want to set a feeding schedule for your baby to make sure that he or she is getting the right amount food. Talk to your baby’s doctor or nurse about how much and how often to feed your baby. They may recommend small portions every 2 to 3 hours. This may also help to reduce vomiting.

• Allow your baby to set the pace. Always approach your baby calmly with smooth movements to avoid too much stimulation during feeding times. Try to avoid rocking or bouncing during feedings.

To Help with Skin Comfort

• If your baby has diarrhea, keep the skin in the diaper area clean and dry. Change diapers often. Baby’s stool can cause damage to sensitive skin. Wash the area with a gentle cleanser and gently pat dry. If recommended, use a barrier cream to protect the skin or help with healing.

• If your baby has a runny or stuffy nose, your baby’s doctor or nurse may recommend using gentle suction or wiping to clean the nose.

• If your baby has stiff muscles or jerky movements, consider putting mittens on baby’s hands and socks on the feet to protect sensitive skin.

• If your baby has trouble regulating temperature, dress in layers to keep baby comfortable. Watch for signs of getting too hot or too cold or clothing that may be itchy or too tight for movement.
When to Call Your Baby’s Doctor Once Baby is Home

Most of the time crying will stop when your baby’s “comfort needs” are met. But you should call your baby’s doctor if any of these things occur:

- Your baby continues to have vomiting or has diarrhea.
- Your baby is having less than 6 wet diapers a day.
- Your baby has a fever over 100.4 degrees F or 38 degrees Celsius when taken under the arm.
- Your baby cries constantly for more than 3 hours or the cry changes from a fussy to a painful cry.
- You feel stressed and think you may hurt or shake your baby. **Never shake your baby!** Contact the 24-hour Parent Connection Line at (614) 722-5437, a service of Nationwide Children’s Hospital, to talk to someone who can help you through the stress you may feel with your baby’s crying.

Babies having drug withdrawal may need more care and lots of your time. Be sure that you get support from family and friends to give you time to rest.

Talk to your doctor or others on your health care team if you have questions. You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3707 or email: health-info@osu.edu.