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.

Keeping baby comfortable

- Handle your baby gently. Avoid sudden movements that can upset him or her. When you touch your baby, begin with less sensitive areas, such as the arms and legs. Start with the baby’s legs and move 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 a “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.
- Let your baby set the pace for activity. Before your baby cries, watch closely for the baby’s cues to add or reduce stimulation. This could be movement, noise or other things going on around him or her. Your baby may show more yawning, hiccups, sneezing movement or looking away as cues to reduce activity.

Feeding help

Some babies may have trouble eating because of problems with his or her 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.
- 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.
- 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 or she needs to eat more often than he or she should.
• 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.

Skin comfort
• Diarrhea: 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.

• Runny nose: 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.

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

• Temperature: If your baby has trouble regulating his or her 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 baby’s doctor
Most of the time, your baby’s crying will stop when his or her “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 cry to a painful cry.

Get help and support
Get help if 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 health care team if you have any questions about your care.
For more health information, contact the Library for Health Information at 614-293-3707 or e-mail health-info@osu.edu.

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