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# Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome and Breastfeeding: A Review of Literature

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# Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome and Breastfeeding:

## A Review of Literature

Alexis Detweiler and Caitlin Ward

### What We Learned

Neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS), or drug withdrawal in an infant that requires pharmacologic treatment after birth, is an increasing problem in the United States. NAS, or drug withdrawal in an infant that requires pharmacologic treatment. The healthcare team is responsible for helping NAS babies manage and cope with withdrawal. Both pharmacological and non-pharmacological methods are used to treat NAS.

#### Background

Breastfeeding neonates pharmacologically treated for NAS has been shown to:

- Reduce the need for pharmacologic treatment in NAS babies
- Improve the wellbeing of neonates with NAS
- Decreases length of hospital stay

#### Purpose & Aims

- To review and synthesize literature that addresses the effect breastfeeding NAS babies has on the length of hospital stay

#### Sample

- Various maternal-newborn pairs
- Mothers enrolled in substance abuse treatment centers
- Newborns being treated for NAS

#### Methods

- CINHAL database
- Research articles only
- Published 2009-2015
- 3 Nursing Journals ; 1 Medical Journal
- Search terms – neonatal abstinence syndrome, breastfeeding, neonatal abstinence syndrome treatment, length of stay

#### Results



#### Breastfeeding reduces the need for pharmacological treatment in NAS babies.

- Only 53% of NAS infants with breastfeeding mothers in opioid maintenance treatment (OMT) programs needed pharmacological treatment, while 80% of NAS infants with non-breastfeeding mothers in OMT programs needed pharmacological treatment (Welle-Strand et al., 2013).
- The newborns of women in OMT programs who were breastfeeding had a shorter pharmacological treatment length of 28.6 days compared to those who were not breastfeeding who had an average length of stay of 46.7 days (Welle-Strand et al., 2013).

#### Breastfeeding improves the wellbeing of neonates with NAS.

- Infants that were exposed to buprenorphine via breast milk maintained optimal health in terms of birth weight, weight gain, sleeping patterns, skin color, head circumference, and elimination and hydration patterns (Gower et al., 2014).
- Breastfeeding is a safe way to expose the infant to a therapeutic dose of buprenorphine. This exposure allows them to better cope with NAS symptoms without any known adverse side effects (Gower et al. 2014).

#### Discussion

- The findings of the four research articles suggest that breastfeeding infants with neonatal abstinence syndrome reduces the length of stay in the hospital following birth.
- Mothers of the infants suffering from NAS need proper education about the advantages of breastfeeding to benefit both the mother and the baby.

#### Next Steps

- Although these research studies suggest that breastfeeding improves the overall well being of NAS babies, further research is required.

#### Limitations

- Difficulty finding articles related to NAS and breastfeeding
- Articles suggested correlations but were inconclusive

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