



Rees-Jones Center for Foster Care Excellence

Tips for Caring for Substance-exposed Infants: Eating and Sleeping

All babies, but especially those exposed to substances require their needs met by consistent and compassionate caregivers. Here are some of the difficulties you may see when caring for these babies and what you can do to help. (Please talk to your medical provider if you have any questions.)

Difficulties you may observe	Things you can do
<p>Feeding problems</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infrequent, uncoordinated sucking • Sucking too quickly • Trouble swallowing or gagging during feeding • Excessive spitting-up or forceful vomiting • Difficulty gaining weight • Fussy during feeding or refusing bottle • Diarrhea, constipation, loose watery stools or gassiness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce environmental stimuli during feeding • Feed smaller amounts and more frequently with rest between sucking • Bring hands to midline to help center infant's attention on bottle • Apply mittens to babies' hands, keep hands clean • Allow sucking on a pacifier in between feedings • Feed on demand, not on a rigid schedule • Try different nipples and different bottles • Burp often • Feed smaller amounts and more frequently • Keep upright after feeding. • Burp often • Frequent visits to check weight and assess hydration in the first few months of life • Baby may benefit from a higher calorie formula • Swaddling during feeding to provide comfort • Smaller, more frequent feedings • Frequent diaper change using barrier creams such as A&D, Desitin, (allow exposure to air for a few minutes in between diaper changes) • Burp often • Rubbing stomach gently after eating • May need discussion with medical provider about possibility of medication or formula change



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Difficulties you may observe	Things you can do
Sleeping problems <ul style="list-style-type: none">Excessive or high-pitched crying before falling asleepSleeplessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Have a calm sleep environment, reduce stimuliEstablish a routineMake sure the temperature is cool and the lights are dimClose fitting onesie, sleep sack or long-sleeved, footed pajamas can make the baby feel swaddledAvoid television, bright lights, or loud noises before bedtimeAllow a pacifierGentle rocking, gentle bouncing or minimize handlingWhite noise or soothing musicMassage
Tremors, twitching or jitteriness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Slow movements. Avoid sudden jolts.Calm, soft voiceReduce lightingMassage and relaxation baths
Congestion	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Try saline drops and bulb suctioning if interfering with eatingAvoid swaddling to observe breathing

Resources:

Early Childhood Intervention Services (ECI)

<https://hhs.texas.gov/services/disability/early-childhood-intervention-services>

Zero to Three

<https://www.zerotothree.org>

CDC Developmental Milestones

<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/index.html>

Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS)

<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/nas.html>

Healthy Children.org from the American Academy of Pediatrics

<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/nas.html>