

Assessment of Tremors in the Infant Undergoing NAS

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It is important to score tremors when you are *disturbing* the baby (*touching them*) and then when you are *not touching* them (*undisturbed*). So the process should go as follows: If babies have tremors when you touch them, they receive a score of 1-2 based on the severity of the tremors. Then you should observe the baby either during the interval between scoring or after you have been touching the baby to see if undisturbed tremors occur. If the baby continues to have tremors while not being touched, you score 3-4 based on the severity of the tremors. The appearance of tremors is an indication of CNS irritability. When a baby has tremors when undisturbed after a period of being disturbed, this indicates that the CNS is very irritated so it is important to assess for both. It is not one or the other. When a baby who has had undisturbed tremors ceases to have them, this is a sign of improvement and that the NAS is on its' way to resolving. The baby may still have *tremors disturbed* but no longer has *tremors undisturbed*. This is an indication that the CNS is less irritable. There is a reason why the items are listed in a specific way on the scoring sheet. Each item is important and needs to be assessed as indicated.

The following is noted in our manual which can be obtained at www.neoadvances.com

Tremors

Tremors and jitteriness are synonymous terms. They are defined as involuntary movements or quivers that are rhythmical with equal amplitude or strength which occur at a fixed point; for example, quivers of the hand when the wrist is stationary (Parker, et. al., 1990).

If the infant is asleep, a few jerking movements of the extremities may be present. These should not be scored since it is not unusual for infants to have startle or jerking movements, particularly of the legs, while asleep (Brazelton, 1984).

Note: Tremors may be induced by stimuli, particularly sound, touch, or passive movement of a joint (McBride, 1984).

Mild Tremors: Disturbed

Score 1 if the infant exhibits observable tremors of the hand or foot when the infant is asleep, drowsy, awake, active, or alert-while being handled (Brazelton, 1984; Parker, et. al., 1990). 18

Moderate-Severe: Disturbed

Score 2 if the infant exhibits observable tremors of the arms (one or both) or legs (one or both), with or without observable tremors of the hands or feet, when the infant is asleep, drowsy, awake, active, or alert-while being handled.

Mild Tremors: Undisturbed

Score 3 if the infant exhibits observable tremors of the hands or feet when the infant is asleep, drowsy, awake, active, or alert, but not being handled by a caregiver.

When observing for undisturbed tremors, be sure to provide the infant with at least two one-minute undisturbed periods during the exam. This can be done by observing the infant's behavior for a minute or so prior to temperature taking as well as before diaper changing. Since each exam should be individualized based on the needs of the baby, you can determine the best time to observe for undisturbed tremors.

Moderate-Severe Tremors: Undisturbed

Score 4 if the infant exhibits observable tremors of the arms (one or both) or legs (one or both), with or without observable tremors of the hands or feet, when the infant is asleep, awake, drowsy, active, or alert, but not being handled by a caregiver.

Note: It is important to assess for tremors disturbed and undisturbed, not just one or the other. The presence of undisturbed tremors indicates excessive irritation of the central nervous system.