Clinical Opiate Withdrawal Scale (COWS)

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| **Resting pulse rate**  *beats/minute. Measured after patient is sitting or lying for one minute.* | | | | | **GI upset**  *Over last 1/2 hour.* | | | | |
| **0** | | | | pulse rate 80 or below | **0** | | no GI symptoms | | |
| **1** | | | | pulse rate 81-100 | **1** | | stomach cramps | | |
| **2** | | | | pulse rate 101-120 | **2** | | nausea or loose stool | | |
| **4** | | | | pulse rate greater than 120 | **3** | | vomiting or diarrhea | | |
|  | | | |  | **5** | | multiple episodes of diarrhea or vomiting | | |
| **Sweating**  O*ver past 1/2 hour not accounted for by room temperature or patient activity*. | | | | | **Tremor**  *Observation of outstretched hands.* | | | | |
| **0** | | | no report of chills or flushing | | **0** | | | no tremor | |
| **1** | | | subjective report of chills or flushing | | **1** | | | tremor can be felt, but not observed | |
| **2** | | | flushed or observable moistness on face | | **2** | | | slight tremor observable | |
| **3** | | | beads of sweat on brow or face | | **4** | | | gross tremor or muscle twitching | |
| **4** | | | sweat streaming off face | |  | | |  | |
| **Restlessness**  *Observation during assessment.* | | | | | **Yawning**  *Observation during assessment.* | | | | |
| **0** | | able to sit still | | | **0** | | no yawning | | |
| **1** | | reports difficulty sitting still, but is able to do so | | | **1** | | yawning once or twice during assessment | | |
| **3** | | frequent shifting or extraneous movements of legs/arms | | | **2** | | yawning three or more times during assessment | | |
| **5** | | unable to sit still for more than a few seconds | | | **4** | | yawning several times/minute | | |
| **Pupil size** | | | | | **Anxiety or Irritability** | | | | |
| **0** | | pupils pinned or normal size for room light | | | **0** | | none | | |
| **1** | | pupils possibly larger than normal for room light | | | **1** | | patient reports increasing irritability or anxiousness | | |
| **2** | | pupils moderately dilated | | | **2** | | patient obviously irritable or anxious | | |
| **5** | | pupils so dilated that only the rim of the iris is visible | | | **4** | | patient so irritable or anxious that participation in the assessment is difficult | | |
| **Bone or Joint aches**  *If patient was having pain previously, only the additional component attributed to opiates withdrawal is scored.* | | | | | **Gooseflesh skin** | | | | |
| **0** | not present | | | | **0** | skin is smooth | | | |
| **1** | mild diffuse discomfort | | | | **3** | piloerection of skin can be felt or hairs standing up on arms | | | |
| **2** | patient reports severe diffuse aching of joints/muscles | | | | **5** | prominent piloerection | | | |
| **4** | patient is rubbing joints or muscles and is unable to sit still because of discomfort | | | |  |  | | | |
| **Runny nose or tearing**  *Not accounted for by cold symptoms or allergies.* | | | | | ***Total Score:***  *The total score is the sum of all 11 items* | | | |  |
| **0** | not present | | | |
| **1** | nasal stuffiness or unusually moist eyes | | | |
| **2** | nose running or tearing | | | |
| **4** | nose constantly running or tears streaming down cheeks | | | |

**Scoring and interpretation:** The COWS assesses 11 opioid withdrawal symptoms. Each symptom is scored differently:

* Resting pulse rate (0,1,2 or 4)
* Sweating (0,1,2,3 or 4)
* Restlessness (0,1,3 or 5)
* Pupil size (0,1,2, or 5)
* Bone or joint aches (0,1,2 or 4)
* Runny nose or tearing (0,1,2, or 4)
* GI upset (0,1,2,3 or 5)
* Tremor (0,1,2 or 4)
* Yawning (0,1,2 or 4)
* Anxiety or irritability (0,1,2 or 4)
* Gooseflesh (0,3 or 5).

A total score is calculated by summing the responses to all 11 items. The minimum total score possible is 0, and the maximum total score possible is 48 (i.e. total score range: 0-48).

**COWS score interpretation**

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| **Score** | **Interpretation** |
| 5-12 | Mild withdrawal |
| 13-24 | Moderate withdrawal |
| 25-36 | Severe withdrawal |
| 37 or more | Very severe withdrawal |

**Tool citation:** Wesson, D.R. and Ling, W. *The Clinical Opiate Withdrawal Scale (COWS).* Journal of Psychoactive Drugs, 2003. **35**(2): 253-259.

**Further information**: Fischer, J.A., Roche, A.M., and Duraisingam, V. *Clinical Opiate Withdrawal Scale (COWS): description, strengths and knowledge gaps*. 2021, National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction (NCETA), Flinders University: Adelaide, South Australia.