

# Clinical Institute Withdrawal Assessment – Benzodiazepine (CIWA-B): description, strengths and knowledge gaps<sup>[1]</sup>

## Purpose

The Clinical Institute Withdrawal Assessment – Benzodiazepine (CIWA-B) is a clinician rating tool for assessing and monitoring the severity of benzodiazepine withdrawal.<sup>[2]</sup>

### Drug(s) of Concern

Benzodiazepine

### Observation Period

Five minutes

### Populations Tested

- Adults<sup>[2]</sup>

### Settings Tested

- AOD specialist services<sup>[2]</sup>

## Diagnostics

Utility: ✓ Benzodiazepine specific

Psychometric properties: • Considered to have good face validity, but has not been tested for sensitivity or specificity<sup>[2]</sup>

# Clinical Institute Withdrawal Assessment – Benzodiazepine (CIWA-B)

## Client reported symptoms

Please circle a number that best describes how you feel

score

1.	<b>Do you feel irritable?</b> 0 Not at all      1 A little      2 Moderately      3 Quite a bit      4 Extremely	<input type="radio"/>
2.	<b>Do you feel fatigued?</b> 0 Not at all      1 A little      2 Moderately      3 Quite a bit      4 Extremely	<input type="radio"/>
3.	<b>Do you feel tense?</b> 0 Not at all      1 A little      2 Moderately      3 Quite a bit      4 Extremely	<input type="radio"/>
4.	<b>Do you have difficulties concentrating?</b> 0 Not at all      1 A little      2 Moderately      3 Quite a bit      4 Extremely	<input type="radio"/>
5.	<b>Do you have any loss of appetite?</b> 0 Not at all      1 A little      2 Moderately      3 Quite a bit      4 Extremely	<input type="radio"/>
6.	<b>Have you any numbness or burning on your face, hands or feet?</b> 0 Not at all      1 A little      2 Moderately      3 Quite a bit      4 Extremely	<input type="radio"/>
7.	<b>Do you feel your heart racing? (palpitations)?</b> 0 Not at all      1 A little      2 Moderately      3 Quite a bit      4 Extremely	<input type="radio"/>
8.	<b>Does your head feel full or achy?</b> 0 Not at all      1 A little      2 Moderately      3 Quite a bit      4 Extremely	<input type="radio"/>
9.	<b>Do you feel muscle aches or stiffness?</b> 0 Not at all      1 A little      2 Moderately      3 Quite a bit      4 Extremely	<input type="radio"/>
10.	<b>Do you feel anxious, nervous or jittery?</b> 0 Not at all      1 A little      2 Moderately      3 Quite a bit      4 Extremely	<input type="radio"/>
11.	<b>Do you feel upset?</b> 0 Not at all      1 A little      2 Moderately      3 Quite a bit      4 Extremely	<input type="radio"/>
12.	<b>How restful was your sleep last night?</b> 4 Not at all      3 A little      2 Moderately      1 Quite a bit      0 Extremely	<input type="radio"/>
13.	<b>Do you feel weak?</b> 0 Not at all      1 A little      2 Moderately      3 Quite a bit      4 Extremely	<input type="radio"/>
14.	<b>Do you think you didn't have enough sleep last night?</b> 0 Not at all      1 A little      2 Moderately      3 Quite a bit      4 Extremely	<input type="radio"/>
15.	<b>Do you have any visual disturbances (sensitivity to light, blurred vision)?</b> 0 Not at all      1 A little      2 Moderately      3 Quite a bit      4 Extremely	<input type="radio"/>
16.	<b>Are you fearful?</b> 0 Not at all      1 A little      2 Moderately      3 Quite a bit      4 Extremely	<input type="radio"/>
17.	<b>Have you been worrying about possible misfortunes lately?</b> 0 Not at all      1 A little      2 Moderately      3 Quite a bit      4 Extremely	<input type="radio"/>

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## Clinical Observations

18.	<b>Observe behaviour for sweating, restlessness &amp; agitation:</b>	None, normal activity		Restless		Paces back & forth; unable to sit still
		0	1	2	3	4
19.	<b>Observe tremor</b>	No tremor	Not visible, can be felt in fingers	Visible but mild	Moderate with arms extended	Severe, with arms not extended
		0	1	2	3	4
20.	<b>Observe/feel palms</b>	No sweating visible	Barely perceptible sweating, palms moist	Palms and forehead moist, reports armpit sweating	Beads of sweat on forehead	Severe drenching sweats
		0	1	2	3	4

21. How many hours of sleep do you think you had last night? \_\_\_\_\_ Hours

22. How many minutes do you think it took you to fall asleep last night? \_\_\_\_\_ Minutes

**Total Score**

## Administrator, Rater, Scoring and Interpretation

Administrator: • Clinician/Worker

Rater: • Clinician/Worker and Client

Scoring & interpretation: The CIWA-B comprises client-reported symptoms and clinical observations.

Questions 1-11 and 13-17 are client-reported symptoms, with each scored on five-point scales from 0 = not at all to 4 = very much so.

Question 12 is also a client-reported item, but the 5 scale is reversed, i.e., 0 = Very much so to 4 = Not at all

Questions 18-20 are clinical observations, with all three scored on five-point scales (i.e. 0, 1, 2, 3 or 4).

A total score is obtained by summing questions 1-20: The minimum total score possible is 0, and the maximum total score possible is 80 (i.e. total score range: 0-80).

### CIWA-B score interpretation

Score	Interpretation
1-20	Mild withdrawal
21-40	Moderate withdrawal
41-60	Severe withdrawal
61-80	Very severe withdrawal

Items 21 and 22 provide additional information regarding withdrawal.

## Resources

Tool citation: Busto, U., Sykora, K. and Sellers, E. *A clinical scale to assess benzodiazepine withdrawal*. *Journal of Clinical Psychopharmacology*, 1989. 9(6): 412-416.<sup>[2]</sup>

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Training & manual: None found.

Other: None found.

## Knowledge Gaps

Very little work has been conducted regarding the psychometric properties and utility of the CIWA-B. Two studies were found that had utilised the CIWA-B for research purposes. In an Australian study, McGregor and colleagues used six items from the CIWA-B to compare fixed and symptom triggered taper methods in in-patient withdrawal treatment for benzodiazepine.<sup>[3]</sup> In an English study,<sup>[4]</sup> a newly developed Benzodiazepine Withdrawal Symptom Questionnaire was compared with the CIWA-B in pharmacologically dependent patients, with both found to be sensitive in detecting withdrawal symptoms.

The CIWA-B was first published in 1989.<sup>[2]</sup> Whether the CIWA-B can detect withdrawal according to the latest DSM-5 criteria has yet to be established.

The initial validation of the CIWA-B was conducted with 28 participants.<sup>[2]</sup> The gender breakdown is unknown. Given the significant use of benzodiazepines within the Australian population and its potential for dependence, further research is required to assess suitability of the CIWA-B for administration with various Australian population groups, particularly women, and for application within the Australian context.

## References

1. Fischer, J.A., Roche, A.M., and Duraisingam, V. *Clinical Institute Withdrawal Assessment – Benzodiazepine (CIWA-B): description, strengths and knowledge gaps*. 2021, National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction (NCETA), Flinders University: Adelaide, South Australia. (overview citation)
2. Busto, U.E., Sykora, K., and Sellers, E.M. *A clinical scale to assess benzodiazepine withdrawal*. *Journal of Clinical Psychopharmacology*, 1989. 9(6): 412-416.
3. McGregor, C., Machin, A., and White, J.M. *In-patient benzodiazepine withdrawal: comparison of fixed and symptom-triggered taper methods*. *Drug and Alcohol Review*, 2003. 22(2): 175-180.
4. Tyrer, P., Murphy, S., and Riley, P. *The benzodiazepine withdrawal symptom questionnaire*. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 1990. 19(1): 53-61.