

Cannabis Withdrawal Scale (CWS): description, strengths and knowledge gaps^[1]

Purpose

The 19 item Cannabis Withdrawal Scale (CWS) is a client-reported assessment of cannabis withdrawal symptoms.

Drug(s) of Concern

Cannabis

Observation Period

Last 24 hours

Populations Tested

- Males & females^[2]
- Adults^[2]

Settings Tested

- AOD specialist services^[2]

Diagnostics

Utility:

- ✓ Validated with an Australian population^[2]
- ✓ Client self-assessment of withdrawal symptoms

Psychometric properties:

- High level of content validity for cannabis withdrawal
- High correlation between the item rankings for intensity of withdrawal & the associated distress caused by withdrawal for each item ($r = 0.51$; $p = 0.007$)^[2]

Cannabis Withdrawal Scale (CWS)

For each question

First circle (0) the number that most closely represents your personal experience:

Then rate (0-10) its negative impact on daily activity

		Not at all		Moderately		Extremely							
1.	The only thing I could think about was smoking some cannabis	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	<input type="radio"/>
2.	I had a headache	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	<input type="radio"/>
3.	I had no appetite	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	<input type="radio"/>
4.	I felt nauseous (like vomiting)	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	<input type="radio"/>
5.	I felt nervous	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	<input type="radio"/>
6.	I had some angry outbursts	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	<input type="radio"/>
7.	I had mood swings	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	<input type="radio"/>
8.	I felt depressed	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	<input type="radio"/>
9.	I was easily irritated	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	<input type="radio"/>
10.	I had been imagining being stoned	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	<input type="radio"/>
11.	I felt restless	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	<input type="radio"/>
12.	I woke up early	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	<input type="radio"/>

For each question

First circle (0) the number that most closely represents your personal experience:

Then rate (0-10) its negative impact on daily activity

Not at all Moderately Extremely

13.	I had a stomach ache	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	<input type="radio"/>
14.	I had nightmares and/or strange dreams	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	<input type="radio"/>
15.	Life seemed like an uphill struggle	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	<input type="radio"/>
16.	I woke up sweating at night	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	<input type="radio"/>
17.	I had trouble getting to sleep at night	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	<input type="radio"/>
18.	I felt physically tense	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	<input type="radio"/>
19.	I had hot flashes	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	<input type="radio"/>

TOTAL PERSONAL EXPERIENCE SCORE

TOTAL NEGATIVE EFFECT SCORE

Administrator, Rater, Scoring and Interpretation

Administrator: Clinician/Worker

Rater: Client

Scoring & interpretation: The CWS comprises 19 items.

Each CWS item is scored twice:

- First, the client circles the number most closely representing their personal experience (personal experience; range: 0-10)
- Second, the client then rates the negative impact of that experience on normal daily activities by writing a number (negative impact: range: 0-10)

Two total scores are calculated, one each for personal experience and negative impact:

- A 'personal experience' score is calculated by summing the circled responses for all 19 questions. The minimum total score possible is 0. The maximum total score possible is 190
- A 'negative experience' score is obtained by summing the written responses for all 19 questions. As with 'personal experience', the minimum total score possible is 0. The maximum total score possible is 190.

Higher total scores reflect more severe withdrawal symptoms.

Resources

Tool citation: Allsop, D., Norberg, M., Copeland, J., et al. *The Cannabis Withdrawal Scale development: patterns and predictors of cannabis withdrawal and distress*. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, 2011. 119(1-2): 123-129.^[2]

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Training/manual: None found.

Other: None found.

Knowledge Gaps

The CWS has been validated in Australia and has demonstrated good internal reliability and content validity. It is also one of the few instruments available for assessing and monitoring withdrawal from cannabis.

The CWS has not been extensively examined across AOD specialist treatment services, e.g., withdrawal services; or in health services generally. The initial study had a small sample size (N=49) and mostly comprised males (67%). The exclusion criteria for the initial study included dependent tobacco smokers, dependent caffeine drinkers, and pregnant women. The authors recognised that the sample size was small and greater numbers and multiple samples are required to enable factor analytical approaches to test the factor structure of the CWS.^[2]

References

1. Fischer, J.A., Roche, A.M., and Duraisingam, V. *Cannabis Withdrawal Scale (CWS): description, strengths and knowledge gaps*. 2021, National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction (NCETA), Flinders University: Adelaide, South Australia. (overview citation)
2. Allsop, D., Norberg, M., Copeland, J., Fu, S., and Budney, A.J. *The Cannabis Withdrawal Scale development: patterns and predictors of cannabis withdrawal and distress*. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, 2011. 119(1-2): 123-129.