

# Objective Opiate Withdrawal Scale (OOWS): description, strengths and knowledge gaps<sup>[1]</sup>

## Purpose

The Objective Opiate Withdrawal Scale (OOWS) is a 13 item clinical rating tool for assessing and monitoring opiate withdrawal symptoms.<sup>[2]</sup> The OOWS has been designed to complement the SOWS.

### Drug(s) of Concern

Opioids/heroin

### Observation Period

Last 5 mins

### Populations Tested

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

### Settings Tested

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

## Diagnostics

### Utility:

- ✓ Brief
- ✓ Easy to administer and score
- ✓ May be used as part of initial assessment, ongoing monitoring to examine responses to treatment medication<sup>[2]</sup>

### Psychometric properties:

- Demonstrated to be a valid and reliable indicator of the severity of opiate withdrawal symptoms in detox patients<sup>[2]</sup>

## Objective Opiate Withdrawal Scale (OOWS)

Please circle (0) one response for each question

Question  
score

- |     |   |                       |
|-----|---|-----------------------|
| 1.  | <b>Yawning</b> (frequency = # of yawns per observation period)<br>0 Not at all      1 One or more   | <input type="radio"/> |
| 2.  | <b>Rhinorrhea</b> (frequency = # of sniffs per observation period)<br>0 None to two      1 Three or more  | <input type="radio"/> |
| 3.  | <b>Piloerection</b> (gooseflesh – observe patient’s arm)<br>0 Absent      1 Present   | <input type="radio"/> |
| 4.  | <b>Perspiration</b><br>0 Absent      1 Present  | <input type="radio"/> |
| 5.  | <b>Lacrimation</b><br>0 Absent      1 Present   | <input type="radio"/> |
| 6.  | <b>Mydriasis</b><br>0 Absent      1 Present   | <input type="radio"/> |
| 7.  | <b>Tremors</b> (hands)<br>0 Absent      1 Present   | <input type="radio"/> |
| 8.  | <b>Hot and cold flushes</b> (shivering or huddling for warmth)<br>0 Absent      1 Present   | <input type="radio"/> |
| 9.  | <b>Restlessness</b> (frequent shifts of position)<br>0 Absent      1 Present  | <input type="radio"/> |
| 10. | <b>Vomiting</b><br>0 Absent      1 Present  | <input type="radio"/> |
| 11. | <b>Muscle twitches</b><br>0 Absent      1 Present   | <input type="radio"/> |
| 12. | <b>Abdominal cramps</b> (holding stomach)<br>0 Absent      1 Present  | <input type="radio"/> |
| 13. | <b>Anxiety</b> (Mild: observable manifestations e.g., foot shaking, fidgeting, finger tapping;<br>Moderate to severe: agitation, unable to sit, trembling, panicky, complains of difficulty<br>breathing, choking cessation, palpitations)<br>0 Absent      1 Present | <input type="radio"/> |

TOTAL SCORE

## Administrator, Rater, Scoring and Interpretation

Administrator: Clinician/Worker

Rater: Clinician/Worker

Scoring & interpretation: The OOWS comprises 13 clinical observations.

Each observation is scored as either absent (0 point) or present (1 point).

A total score is calculated by summing all 13 items. The minimum total score possible is 0, and the maximum total score possible is 13 (i.e. total score range: 0-13).

A higher score indicates greater opiate withdrawal symptoms.

## Resources

Tool citation: Handelsman, L., Cochrane, K., Aronson, M., et al. *Two new rating scales for opiate withdrawal*. *American Journal of Drug and Alcohol Abuse*, 1987. 13(3): 293-308.<sup>[2]</sup>

Copyright: Freely available. May be downloaded and used by clinicians.

Training/manual: None found.

Other: None found.

## Knowledge Gaps

The OOWS has been widely mentioned in policy and clinical guideline documents as a clinician/worker tool for assessing and monitoring opioid withdrawal symptoms.

Within the Australian context:

- Content and construct validity, and responsiveness is uncertain
- Tool acceptance by administrators and raters is unclear.

Few studies have examined opiate withdrawal through a gender lens. There is a need to better understand how males and females may experience and manage withdrawal differently. Research is required to examine how opiate withdrawal/assessment of withdrawal symptoms may differ between men and women. A recent study conducted with the OOWS has suggested that there are sex-based differences in people with chronic pain who misuse prescribed opioids, with women experiencing much higher levels of pain and withdrawal symptoms.<sup>[3]</sup>

## References

1. Fischer, J.A., Roche, A.M., and Duraisingam, V. *Objective Opioid Withdrawal Scale (OOWS): description, strengths and knowledge gaps*. 2021, National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction (NCETA), Flinders University: Adelaide, South Australia. (overview citation)
2. Handelsman, L., Cochrane, K., Aronson, M., et al. *Two new rating scales for opiate withdrawal*. *American Journal of Drug and Alcohol Abuse*, 1987. 13(3): 293-308.
3. Huhn, A., Tompkins, D., Campbell, C., and Dunn, K.E. *Individuals with chronic pain who misuse prescription opioids report sex-based differences in pain and opioid withdrawal*. *Pain Medicine*, 2019. 20(10): 1942-1947.