

Clinical Opiate Withdrawal Scale (COWS)

Item	Options	Points
Resting pulse rate	80 or below: Pulse rate 80 or below	0
	81 to 100: Pulse rate 81-100	1
	101 to 120: Pulse rate 101-120	2
	Over 120: Pulse rate greater than 120	4
Sweating	None: No report of chills or flushing	0
	Reported: Subjective report of chills or flushing	1
	Moist face: Flushed or observable moistness on face	2
	Beads: Beads of sweat on brow or face	3
	Streaming: Sweat streaming off face	4
Restlessness	Still: Able to sit still	0
	Reports difficulty: Reports difficulty sitting still, but is able to do so	1
	Frequent shifting: Frequent shifting or extraneous movements of legs or arms	3
	Cannot sit still: Unable to sit still for more than a few seconds	5
Pupil size	Normal: Pupils pinned or normal size for room light	0
	Possibly larger: Pupils possibly larger than normal for room light	1
	Moderately dilated: Pupils moderately dilated	2
	Only rim of iris: Pupils so dilated that only the rim of the iris is visible	5
Bone or joint aches	Not present	0
	Mild: Mild diffuse discomfort	1
	Severe aching reported: Patient reports severe diffuse aching of joints or muscles	2
	Rubbing joints: Patient is rubbing joints or muscles and is unable to sit still because of discomfort	4
Runny nose or tearing	Not present	0
	Stuffy or moist eyes: Nasal stuffiness or unusually moist eyes	1
	Running or tearing: Nose running or tearing	2
	Constant: Nose constantly running or tears streaming down cheeks	4
GI upset	None: No GI symptoms	0
	Cramps: Stomach cramps	1
	Nausea or loose stool	2
	Vomiting or diarrhea	3
	Multiple episodes: Multiple episodes of diarrhea or vomiting	5
Tremor	None: No tremor	0
	Felt only: Tremor can be felt, but not observed	1
	Slight: Slight tremor observable	2
	Gross: Gross tremor or muscle twitching	4
Yawning	None: No yawning	0
	Once or twice: Yawning once or twice during assessment	1

Item	Options	Points
	Three or more: Yawning three or more times during assessment	2
	Several per minute: Yawning several times per minute	4
Anxiety or irritability	None	0
	Reported: Patient reports increasing irritability or anxiousness	1
	Obvious: Patient obviously irritable or anxious	2
	Limits assessment: Patient so irritable or anxious that participation in the assessment is difficult	4
Gooseflesh skin	Smooth: Skin is smooth	0
	Felt or hairs up: Piloerection of skin can be felt or hairs standing up on arms	3
	Prominent: Prominent piloerection	5

Interpretation

0–4	Below mild range. The score is below the published mild band. Withdrawal is absent or minimal at this time; reassess if symptoms appear or per protocol.
5–12	Mild withdrawal. Mild withdrawal. Keep monitoring, offer comfort measures and reassess on schedule.
13–24	Moderate withdrawal. Moderate withdrawal. Notify the provider and follow your facility's withdrawal or treatment protocol.
25–36	Moderately severe. Moderately severe withdrawal. Notify the provider promptly, monitor closely and watch fluid balance.
37–48	Severe withdrawal. Severe withdrawal. Escalate care right away and follow facility protocol for close monitoring and treatment.

Total score: _____ Date: _____ Assessed by: _____

Wesson & Ling, 2003. Sources: Wesson & Ling 2003, The Clinical Opiate Withdrawal Scale (PubMed); NIDA: Clinical Opiate Withdrawal Scale form.
Free calculator and full guide: nursingscales.com/cows-scale/ · Educational material; does not replace clinical judgment or facility protocols.