

Clinical Opioid Withdrawal Scale Assessment



Know the scale before using it

Familiarize yourself with each symptom and how severity is scored to ensure consistent assessments



Establish a baseline score

Record an initial COWS score before initiating treatment to monitor changes over time



Apply clinical judgment

Interpret scores in the context of the individual's comorbidities, medications, and behaviors (e.g., anxiety elevating heart rate)



Involve the patient

Encourage patients to report subjective symptoms—especially if experienced with withdrawal. Patients often know themselves and their withdrawal well.



Don't solely rely on the score

Symptoms like anxiety or GI distress can be overrepresented. Ensure that objective signs also are present and that other medical conditions are not majorly interacting. History is also important



Repeat score assessment after medication

This tracks withdrawal progression and can guide further treatment.



Questions about opioid withdrawal diagnosis and management?

Contact the Minnesota Regional Poison Center at 1-800-222-1222 to assistance 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

<https://www.mdcalc.com/calc/1985/cows-score-opiate-withdrawal>

