

# Opioid Withdrawal

For opioid withdrawal adult patients only.

### History

- Recent opioid drug use
- Chronic opioid drug use
- Narcotic prescriptions in the household or on person
- Evidence of illicit drug use (e.g., needles, paraphernalia)
- Chronic medical conditions requiring opioid medication
- Overdose reversal with naloxone

### Signs and Symptoms

- Tachycardia
- Gastrointestinal distress
- Hot/cold flashes
- Poor concentration
- Diaphoresis
- Rhinorrhea
- Restlessness
- Piloerection
- Yawning


### Differential

- Diabetic emergency
- Neurological disorder
- Traumatic injury
- Alcohol withdrawal
- Benzodiazepine withdrawal

Any exclusion criteria present?

1. Under 18 years of age
2. Pregnant
3. Any methadone use within past 10 days
4. Altered mental status and unable to give consent
5. Severe medical illness (e.g., sepsis, respiratory distress, etc.)
6. Recent benzodiazepine, alcohol, or intoxicant suspected
7. Unable to comprehend potential risks and benefits for any reason
8. Not a candidate for Suboxone maintenance treatment for any reason

Yes

 **Not eligible for Suboxone.**  
Leave MAT brochure with patient.

No

Perform COWS.  
COWS  $\geq$  7?

No

Yes

**P** Provide supportive treatment.  
Provide counseling and assess patient interest in Suboxone.



Is patient agreeable to treatment?

No

Provide leave behind naloxone and MAT brochure

Yes

**P** **Contact Base Hospital**  
Request Suboxone order  
**WITH APPROVAL**  
Give water to moisten mucous membranes  
**Suboxone**  
Perform repeat COWS after 10 minutes  
For persistent or worsening symptoms repeat **Suboxone**  
Perform repeat COWS after 10 minutes  
Provide leave behind naloxone and MAT brochure

 **Notify receiving facility.**  
**Consider Base Hospital for medical direction** 

### Pearls

- Treatment must be authorized by the Base Hospital prior to initiation.
- Ensure Suboxone dosage is included in patient transfer at hospital. This information must be included so the patient can begin the process of being enrolled in Medication Assisted Therapy (MAT).



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## Clinical Opioid Withdrawal Scale (COWS)

### ANXIETY OR IRRITABILITY

*Visually observed during assessment*

- 0 None
- 1 Reports increasing irritability or anxiousness
- 2 Visually irritable or anxious
- 4 Too irritable to participate or affecting participation

### RESTING HEART RATE

*Measured after sitting for one (1) minute*

- 0  $\leq 80$  bpm
- 1 81-100 bpm
- 2 101-120 bpm
- 4  $> 120$  bpm

### BONE OR JOINT ACHEs

*Only new pain attributed to withdrawal is scored*

- 0 Not present
- 1 Mild, diffuse discomfort
- 2 Reports severe, diffuse aching if joints/muscles
- 4 Patient rubbing joints/muscles and unable to be still

### RESTLESSNESS

*Visually observed during assessment*

- 0 Able to be still
- 1 Report difficulty being still, but able to do so
- 3 Frequent shifting or extraneous movement of legs/arms
- 5  $>$ Unable to be still for more than a few seconds

### GOOSEFLESH SKIN

*Visually or physically observed during assessment*

- 0 Skin is smooth
- 3 Piloerection of skin can be felt or arm hairs standing up
- 5 Prominent piloerection

### TREMOR

*Observation of outstretched hands*

- 0 No tremors
- 1 Tremor can be felt but not observed
- 2 Slight tremor observed
- 4 Gross tremor or muscle twitching

### GASTROINTESTINAL UPSET

*Within past 30 minutes*

- 0 No GI symptoms
- 1 Stomach cramps
- 2 Nausea or loose stool
- 3 Vomiting or diarrhea
- 5 Multiple episodes of diarrhea or vomiting

### SWEATING

*Over past 30 minutes – not environmental or from activity*

- 0 No reports of chills or flushing
- 1 Subjective report of chills or flushing
- 2 Flushed or observable moistness to face
- 3 Beads of sweat on brow or face
- 4 Sweat streaming off face

### PUPIL SIZE

*Visually observed during assessment*

- 0 Pupils pinned or normal size for ambient light
- 1 Pupils possibly larger than normal for ambient light
- 2 Pupils moderately dilated
- 5 Pupils very dilated

### YAWNING

*Visually observed during assessment*

- 0 No yawning
- 1 Yawning once or twice during assessment
- 2 Yawning three or more times during assessment
- 4 Yawning several times/minute

### RUNNY NOSE OR TEARING

*Not accounted for by cold symptoms or allergies*

- 0 Not present
- 1 Nasal stuffiness or unusually moist eyes
- 2 Runny nose or eyes tearing
- 4 Nose constantly running or tears streaming down face

### TOTAL COWS SCORING

- 5-12 Mild withdrawal
- 13-24 Moderate withdrawal
- 25-36 Moderately severe withdrawal
- $> 36$  Severe withdrawal

