

Alcohol Withdrawal Symptoms Assessment

The Clinical Institute Withdrawal Assessment for Alcohol–Revised (CIWA–AR) protocol is the most common method of identifying the severity of alcohol withdrawal in healthcare settings.

CIWA–AR assesses the impacts of alcohol withdrawal symptoms. In a clinical setting, scores would normally be derived from conversations with a healthcare professional. Scores are taken together with other observations of symptoms, and medication might be prescribed or adjusted as a result.

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Nausea and vomiting

Do you feel sick to your stomach? Have you vomited?

0 no nausea and no vomiting

1 mild nausea with no vomiting

4 intermittent nausea with dry heaves

7 constant nausea, frequent dry heaves and vomiting

Tremor

Arms extended and fingers spread apart. What is observed?

0 no tremor

1 no visible, but can be felt fingertip to fingertip

4 moderate when arms are extended

7 severe, even with arms not extended

Paroxysmal sweats

Paroxysmal is a medical term meaning sudden. What is observed?

0 no sweat visible

1 barely perceptible sweating, palms moist

4 beads of sweat obvious on forehead

7 drenching sweats

Anxiety

Do you feel nervous? What is observed?

0 no anxiety, at ease

1 mildly anxious

4 moderately anxious, or guarded, so anxiety is inferred

7 equivalent to acute panic states as seen in severe delirium or acute schizophrenic reactions

Agitation

What is observed?

0 normal activity

1 somewhat more than normal activity

4 moderately fidgety and restless

7 paces back and forth during most of the interview or constantly thrashes about

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Tactile disturbances

Itching, pins & needles, burning, numbness or feeling of things on or under your skin?

- 0 none
- 1 very mild itching, pins & needles...
- 2 mild itching...
- 3 moderate itching...

- 4 moderately severe hallucinations
- 5 severe hallucinations
- 6 extremely severe hallucinations
- 7 continuous hallucinations

Auditory disturbances

Awareness of harsh or frightening sounds, or things that are not there?

- 0 not present
- 1 very mild harshness or ability to frighten
- 2 mild harshness or ability to frighten
- 3 moderate harshness or ability to frighten

- 4 moderately severe hallucinations
- 5 severe hallucinations
- 6 extremely severe hallucinations
- 7 continuous hallucinations

Visual disturbances

Is light too bright, colours changed, or seeing things that are not there?

- 0 not present
- 1 very mild sensitivity
- 2 mild sensitivity
- 3 moderate sensitivity

- 4 moderately severe hallucinations
- 5 severe hallucinations
- 6 extremely severe hallucinations
- 7 continuous hallucinations

Headache or fullness in head

Does your head feel different? (Do not rate for dizziness or lightheadedness)

- 0 not present
- 1 very mild
- 2 mild
- 3 moderate

- 4 moderately severe
- 5 severe
- 6 very severe
- 7 extremely severe

Disorientation

What day is this? Where are you? Who are other people?

- 0 oriented and can do serial additions
- 1 cannot do serial additions or is uncertain about the date
- 2 disoriented by less than 2 calendar days

- 3 disoriented by more than 2 calendar days
- 4 disoriented for place or people

Scoring and interpretation

Total your score for each question

- 0-7 no medication is necessary
- 8-14 medication might be required
- 15-20 medication is recommended
- 20+ poses a strong risk of delirium tremens

CIWA-AR score

Sullivan JT, Sykora K, Schneiderman J, Naranjo CA, Sellers EM. (1989) Assessment of alcohol withdrawal: The revised Clinical Institute Withdrawal Assessment for Alcohol scale (CIWA-AR). British Journal of Addiction. 84:1353-1357.