# CIWA-Ar for Alcohol Withdrawal

## INPUTS

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Nausea/vomiting  *Ask 'Do you feel sick to your stomach? Have you vomited?'* | **Options:**   * No nausea and no vomiting (0) * Mild nausea and no vomiting (1) * (More severe symptoms) (2) * (More severe symptoms) (3) * Intermittent nausea with dry heaves (4) * (More severe symptoms) (5) * (More severe symptoms) (6) * Constant nausea, frequent dry heaves and vomiting (7) |
| Tremor  *Arms extended and fingers spread apart* | **Options:**   * No tremor (0) * Not visible, but can be felt fingertip to fingertip (1) * (More severe symptoms) (2) * (More severe symptoms) (3) * Moderate, with patient's arms extended (4) * (More severe symptoms) (5) * (More severe symptoms) (6) * Severe, even with arms not extended (7) |
| Paroxysmal sweats | **Options:**   * No sweat visible (0) * Barely perceptible sweating, palms moist (1) * (More severe symptoms) (2) * (More severe symptoms) (3) * Beads of sweat obvious on forehead (4) * (More severe symptoms) (5) * (More severe symptoms) (6) * Drenching sweats (7) |
| Anxiety  *Ask, 'Do you feel nervous?'* | **Options:**   * No anxiety, at ease (0) * Mildly anxious (1) * (More severe symptoms) (2) * (More severe symptoms) (3) * Moderately anxious, or guarded, so anxiety is inferred (4) * (More severe symptoms) (5) * (More severe symptoms) (6) * Equivalent to acute panic states as seen in severe delirium or acute schizophrenic reactions (7) |
| Agitation | **Options:**   * Normal activity (0) * Somewhat more activity than normal activty (1) * (More severe symptoms) (2) * (More severe symptoms) (3) * Moderately fidgety and restless (4) * (More severe symptoms) (5) * (More severe symptoms) (6) * Paces back and forth during most of the interview, or constantly thrashes about (7) |
| Tactile disturbances  *Ask, 'Have you any itching, pins and needles sensations, any burning, any numbness, or do you feel bugs crawling on or under your skin?'* | **Options:**   * None (0) * Very mild itching, pin and needles, burning, or numbness (1) * Mild itching, pin and needles, burning, or numbness (2) * Moderate itching, pin and needles, burning, or numbness (3) * Moderately severe hallucinations (4) * Severe hallucinations (5) * Extremely severe hallucinations (6) * Continuous hallucinations (7) |
| Auditory disturbances  *Ask, 'Are you more aware of sounds around you? Are they harsh? Do they frighten you? Are you hearing anything that is disturbing to you? Are you hearing things you know are not there?'* | **Options:**   * Not present (0) * Very mild harshness or ability to frighten (1) * Mild harshness or ability to frighten (2) * Moderate harshness or ability to frighten (3) * Moderately severe hallucinations (4) * Severe hallucinations (5) * Extremely severe hallucinations (6) * Continuous hallucinations (7) |
| Visual disturbances  *Ask 'Does the light appear to be too bright? Is its color different? Does it hurt your eyes? Are you seeing anything that is disturbing to you? Are you seeing things you know are not there?'* | **Options:**   * Not present (0) * Very mild sensitivity (1) * Mild sensitivity (2) * Moderate sensitivity (3) * Moderately severe hallucinations (4) * Severe hallucinations (5) * Extremely severe hallucinations (6) * Continuous hallucinations (7) |
| Headache/fullness in head  *Ask 'Does your head feel different? Does it feel like there is a band around your head?' Do not rate for dizziness or lightheadedness. Otherwise, rate 'severity.'* | **Options:**   * Not Present (0) * Very mild (1) * Mild (2) * Moderate (3) * Moderately severe (4) * Severe (5) * Very severe (6) * Extremely severe (7) |
| Orientation/clouding of sensorium  *Ask 'What day is this? Where are you? Who am I?'* | **Options:**   * Oriented, can do serial additions (0) * Can't do serial additions or is uncertain about date (1) * Disoriented for date by no more than 2 calendar days (2) * Disoriented for date by more than 2 calendar days (3) * Disoriented to place or person (4) |

## FORMULA

Addition of the selected points.

## FACTS & FIGURES

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Score | Withdrawal Level |
| ≤8 | Absent or minimal withdrawal |
| 9-19 | Mild to moderate withdrawal |
| ≥20 | Severe withdrawal |

## EVIDENCE APPRAISAL

Multiple randomized trials and observational studies support use of symptom-triggered treatment (using CIWA-Ar) over fixed-schedule treatment (in which benzodiazepines are given at fixed intervals) or vitals-triggered treatment.

Superior clinical endpoints include:

* Decreased frequency of oversedation in patients with milder alcohol withdrawal.
* Decreased frequency of under-treatment in patients with greater severity of withdrawal.
* Shorter periods of hospitalization.
* Lower incidence of delirium tremens ([Wartenburg 1990](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/2178476), [Saitz 1994](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/?term=8046805), [Mayo-Smith 1997](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/9214531), [Reoux 2000](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/10934575), [Jaeger 2001](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/?term=11444401), [Nuss 2004](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/15119493)).

There is also some evidence for combined symptom-triggered and fixed-schedule treatment utilizing CIWA-Ar ([Daeppen 2002](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/?term=12020181)).

The original CIWA-A, published by [Shaw et al in 1981](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/7334148/), was developed to assess the severity of alcohol withdrawal, both to monitor response to treatment and for use in research. The CIWA-Ar developed by [Sullivan et al (1989)](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/2597811) eliminated several redundant and ineffective items to increase the scale’s efficiency while retaining clinical usefulness, validity and reliability. This article proposes the CIWA-Ar scale as a shortened version of the original CIWA-A scale.

[Reoux](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/10934575) and colleagues compared routine hospital alcohol detoxification practice with CIWA-Ar-based as-needed protocol in a retrospective chart review and found fewer total chlordiazepoxide milligram equivalents used over a shorter duration with utilization of CIWA-Ar.