

# How to Identify Opioid Withdrawal

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## → To identify opioid withdrawal syndrome in clients:

- Ask the client about their history with opioid withdrawal
- Assess for the symptoms of opioid withdrawal syndrome. These symptoms usually show up 12 to 24 hours after the last use of short-acting opioids (such as heroin, morphine, oxycodone, and hydrocodone) and include
  - enlarged pupils
  - yawning
  - sweating or chills
  - watery eyes or runny nose
  - nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea
  - lost appetite
  - stomach cramps
  - restlessness and inability to sit still
  - joint and bone aches
  - anxiety, irritability, fast heartbeat
  - shaking or twitches
  - bumpy skin (gooseflesh or piloerection).

**Three** or more of the above symptoms imply that clinically significant withdrawal syndrome is present. If in doubt about opioid withdrawal, use the Clinical Opioid Withdrawal Scale (COWS) (available at [drugabuse.gov/sites/default/files/ClinicalOpiateWithdrawalScale.pdf](https://www.drugabuse.gov/sites/default/files/ClinicalOpiateWithdrawalScale.pdf)) to determine the level of withdrawal, but a formal COWS score does not need to be documented to diagnose opioid withdrawal syndrome.