

The Barnes Akathisia Rating Scale

Akathisia is characterized by subjective complaints of restlessness that result in a patient responding by making compulsive movements. It is diagnosed using both objective and subjective criteria. Using the Barnes Akathisia Rating Scale (BARS), below, can help you determine the presence of akathisia, as well as its severity.¹⁻³

Instructions: Patients should be observed while they are seated, and then standing while engaged in neutral conversation (for a minimum of 2 minutes in each position). Symptoms observed in other situations (for example, while engaged in activities on the ward) may also be rated. Subsequently, the subjective phenomena should be elicited by direct questioning.

Objective	0	Normal, occasional fidgety movements of the limbs
	1	Presence of characteristic restless movements: shuffling or tramping of the legs/feet, or swinging of 1 leg, while sitting, <i>and/or</i> rocking from foot to foot or "walking on the spot" when standing, but movements are present for less than half the time observed
	2	Observed phenomena as described in (1) above, which are present for at least half the observation period
	3	The patient is constantly engaged in characteristic restless movements, <i>and/or</i> has the inability to remain seated or standing without walking or pacing, during the time observed

	Awareness of restlessness	Distress related to restlessness		
Subjective	0	Absence of inner restlessness	0	No distress
	1	Nonspecific sense of inner restlessness	1	Mild distress
	2	The patient is aware of an inability to keep legs still, or of a desire to move the legs, <i>and/or</i> complains of inner restlessness aggravated specifically by being required to stand still	2	Moderate distress
	3	Awareness of an intense compulsion to move most of the time <i>and/or</i> reports a strong desire to walk or pace most of the time	3	Severe distress

Global Clinical Assessment of Akathisia	0	Absent. No evidence of awareness of restlessness. Observation of characteristic movements of akathisia in the absence of a subjective report of inner restlessness or a compulsive desire to move the legs should be classified as pseudoakathisia
	1	Questionable. Nonspecific inner tension and fidgety movements
	2	Mild akathisia. Awareness of restlessness in the legs <i>and/or</i> inner restlessness worse when required to stand still. Fidgety movements present, but characteristic restless movements of akathisia are not necessarily observed. Condition causes little or no distress
	3	Moderate akathisia. Awareness of restlessness as described for mild akathisia above, combined with characteristic restless movements, such as rocking from foot to foot when standing. Patient finds the condition distressing
	4	Marked akathisia. Subjective experience of restlessness, including a compulsive desire to walk or pace. However, the patient is able to remain seated for at least 5 minutes. The condition is obviously distressing
	5	Severe akathisia. The patient reports a strong compulsion to pace up and down most of the time. Unable to sit or lie down for more than a few minutes. Constant restlessness, which is associated with intense distress and insomnia

A score of 2 or more on the global clinical assessment indicates a diagnosis of akathisia.¹

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