

CAGE Alcohol Abuse Screening Tool

The CAGE questionnaire, the name of which is an acronym of its four questions, is a widely used screening test for problem drinking and potential alcohol problems (alcoholism).

Ask your patients these four questions and use the scoring method described below to determine if substance abuse exists and needs to be addressed.

C	Have you ever felt the need to cut down on your drinking?	Yes	No
A	Have people annoyed you by criticizing your drinking?	Yes	No
G	Have you ever felt guilty about drinking?	Yes	No
E	Have you ever felt you needed a drink first thing in the morning (Eye-Opener) to steady your nerves or to get rid of a hang over?	Yes	No

Interpreting the CAGE Screening Tool

Two "yes" responses indicate that the possibility of alcoholism should be investigated further.

The CAGE questionnaire, among other methods, has been extensively validated for use in identifying alcoholism. CAGE is considered a validated screening technique, with one study determining that CAGE test scores ≥ 2 had a specificity of 76% and a sensitivity of 93% for the identification of excessive drinking and a specificity of 77% and a sensitivity of 91% for the identification of alcoholism.

By far the most important question in the CAGE questionnaire is the use of a drink as an Eye Opener, so much so that some clinicians use a "yes" to this question alone as a positive to the questionnaire; this is because the use of an alcoholic drink as an Eye Opener connotes dependence since the patient is going through possible withdrawal in the morning, hence the need for a drink as an Eye Opener.

References

- Ewing, John A. "Detecting Alcoholism: The CAGE Questionnaire" JAMA 252: 1905-1907, 1984 PMID 6471323
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Bernadt, MW; Mumford, J; Taylor, C; Smith, B; Murray, RM (1982). "Comparison of questionnaire and laboratory tests in the detection of excessive drinking and alcoholism". Lancet 6 (8267): 325-8. doi:10.1016/S0140-6736(82)91579-3. PMID 6120322.