

Pain Assessment Tool Guidelines for use: Adjective Rating Scale

(0)	(2)	(4)	(6)	(8)	(10)
No Pain	Mild	Discomforting	Distressing	Horrible	Excruciating Pain

Description: The Adjective Rating Scale (ARS) allows patients who are unable to quantify their pain in numeric terms to use an adjective to describe its severity.

Instructions for use:

Ask the patient: “are you having any pain (discomfort) right now?”

- If no, then indicate ‘0’.

If the patient indicates they have pain, ask:

- If not then ask: Would you say that your discomfort is mild, discomforting, distressing, horrible, or excruciating?

Scoring instructions: Scoring is modified to convert it from a 0-5 to a 0-10 scale.

0 = No pain

2 = Mild pain

4 = Discomforting pain

6 = Distressing pain

8 = Horrible pain

10 = Excruciating pain

If the patient indicates that their discomfort is between two of the descriptors, (e.g. between horrible and excruciating), then the odd number between these values (e.g. “9”) is recorded.

Populations for use:

ARS can be used for adults, who are able to understand and use the scale. It can be used for both chronic and acute pain. It is used for patients that have a hard time quantifying pain using the Numeric Pain Scale.

Validity and reliability:

VDS is valid and reliable for quantifying pain in adults, however the values are in rank order not interval (meaning “horrible” pain is worse than “discomforting” pain, but not necessarily twice as bad). It is thought this scale describes the level of emotional distress associated with pain rather than the physical sensation of pain itself. It’s validation was done as a subscale of the widely used McGill Pain Questionnaire. For research studies, it is used as a part of other measures rather than a stand-alone score.

References:

Gaston-Johansson F, Albert M, Fagan E et al. (1990) Similarities in pain descriptors of four different ethnic-cultural groups. *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management*, 5: 94-100.

Melzack R. The McGill Pain Questionnaire. In: Pain Measurement and Assessment. New York:Raven Press, 1983, 41-48.

Melzack, R. The short-form McGill Pain Questionnaire. *Pain* 1987;30:191-7