



connect

wellbeing, ability, recovery

BENZOS

Information, guidance and advice

What are Benzos?

Benzodiazepines are a group of medicines that are sometimes used to treat anxiety, sleeping problems and other disorders. Examples include: diazepam, lorazepam, chlordiazepoxide, oxazepam, temazepam, nitrazepam, flurazepam, loprozepam, lormetazepam, clobazam and clonazepam.

Benzodiazepines are sometimes prescribed for short periods to ease symptoms of anxiety, sleeping difficulty and sometimes for other reasons. A benzodiazepine will often work well in the short-term, but is not normally advised for more than 2-4 weeks.

How do they work?

The body produces different brain chemicals which either have a “quietening” or “excitatory” effect on the brain. These natural brain chemicals are in fact neurotransmitters which send messages from one brain cell to another. When people suffer from anxiety, panic attacks etc then the brain becomes “over-active” and it needs the transmitters associated with the “quietening” chemicals to come into action. These respond by sending messages to the brain cells to slow down or to stop and because, as earlier stated, the number of brain cells responsive to these transmitters is high then it has a quietening affect on the brain.

Are benzodiazepines addictive?

Yes. Around 4 in every 10 people who take them continuously for more than 6 weeks will get withdrawal symptoms. These include difficulty in sleeping, feeling tense and agitated – rather like the return of the symptoms the medication was originally prescribed for. You can also get dizziness, metallic tastes, and disturbances of your vision.

Withdrawal Symptoms

They will usually start within 48 hours of stopping or reducing the dose of a benzodiazepine. They can be mild and pass off within a few days. For some people they may be so severe that they produce confusion, hallucinations and epileptic fits. Some people experience unpleasant symptoms for several months afterwards.

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What are the main side effects? •

- Sleepiness
- Unsteadiness
- Memory problems
- Lethargy
- Poor concentration
- Addiction

Most people find they don't have significant problems of this sort with controlled short term use. If you take it for longer, the medicine may lose its effect (you may become tolerant to the effect) and you may also become dependent (addicted) to it. Sometimes the symptoms you are left with after long-term use of these medicines are worse than the symptoms for which they were originally given.

What are the risks of Benzos?

Using Benzo's can be risky, and especially dangerous if you mix them with other depressant drugs like heroin or alcohol.

- Some have been shown to cause short-term memory loss and big doses can make a user forgetful and make them overly sleepy.
- They can be highly addictive, and so are recommended only for short-term use in medicine.
- People who are addicted to Benzo's can experience nasty withdrawal symptoms, which can include decreased concentration, tremors, nausea, vomiting, headaches, anxiety, panic attacks and depression. Very uncomfortable bodily sensations can also develop; and fits can occur, which in severe cases can be fatal.
- Sudden withdrawal after big doses or from some specific drugs can cause panic attacks or fits.

Did you know?

- A conviction for a drug-related offence could have a serious impact. It can stop you visiting certain countries – for example the United States – and limit the types of jobs you can apply for.
- Like drinking and driving, driving while impaired by drugs is illegal. You can get a heavy fine, be disqualified from driving or even go to prison. Because Benzo's can impair judgment and reaction time it is recommended that people do not drive or operate heavy machinery were they are taking them.

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Managing withdrawal

If you have been on a benzodiazepine continuously for more than 3 weeks or so, you should not stop them suddenly. Most people withdraw from them gradually by reducing the daily dose every 2-4 weeks, by an 1/8 or a 1/4. It is better to reduce too slowly rather than too quickly.

Some benzodiazepines, such as Lorazepam, are harder to come off than others. If you are having difficulty with your medication, then your doctor might switch over to an alternative.

How effective are benzodiazepines?

Benzodiazepines work well for the short-term treatment of both anxiety and sleep. They work particularly well in generalised anxiety disorder and social anxiety disorder. They can also be helpful in panic and obsessive compulsive disorders, but in these conditions antidepressants – especially the SSRIs – seem to work better. In all the conditions in which they are used, benzodiazepines tend to produce dependence and withdrawal reactions.

They should really only be used for periods of a few weeks or so.

What can I do to help myself?

Self-help treatments for anxiety and insomnia are available from health professionals, in books and over the internet. Learning techniques to relax and help with sleep etc is crucial to help with anxious feelings.

Other tips

- Regular exercise
- Good diet
- Talk about your problems
- Breathing techniques

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Advice and Getting Help

Getting the correct help and support is crucial to the recovery and success of anyone with issues linked to drug and substance misuse. We would advise anyone who is experiencing problems with drugs to seek help and support immediately. Involving your GP is strongly advised as your GP has a wide variety of services available and can also check to see if you require medical assistance as well as therapeutic support. The community and voluntary sector provides excellent services in partnership with statutory care providers.

Below is a range of info and treatment services available:

Talk to Frank - <https://www.talktofrank.com/>

Addiction NI - <http://addictionni.com/>

Drugs and Alcohol NI - <https://www.drugsandalcoholni.info/>





Discover more information on our website:

www.inspireconnect.info