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- Benzodiazepines should be used carefully under close direction of a prescriber.
- Not using benzodiazepines for the right reason or using them for too long can lead to dependence, addiction, severe side effects, or even death.
- Stopping benzodiazepines should be done by slowly lowering the dose over weeks to months with careful direction from a prescriber to avoid withdrawal symptoms.

What are Benzodiazepines (BZDs)?

Benzodiazepines are medications that lower the activity of the nerves in the brain and cause you to be drowsy.¹

How do they work?

Benzodiazepines work by boosting the effects of gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA) in the brain.¹ GABA is a chemical that reduces electrical activity in the brain.¹

What are they used for?

Benzodiazepines can be used to treat problems such as general anxiety disorder, panic attacks, difficulty sleeping, alcohol withdrawal, and seizures.^{1,2,3}

When should they be used for treatment?

- Benzodiazepines are recommended for short-term relief of symptoms such as anxiety or difficulty sleeping.
- Long-term use must be done under close direction of the prescriber.³
- These medications should only be used when prescribed for medical treatment.
- Use in people aged 55 and older should be avoided.³

Are these medications safe to use?

- Long-Term Use
 - When used in older people for long-term use this can increase the risk of memory problems, drowsiness, falls, and motor vehicle accidents.
 - Long-term use can lead to tolerance where the body needs higher doses to get the same benefit as when the medication was first started.²
- Side Effects
 - Severe side effects of this medication are trouble breathing, severe drowsiness, slowed heart rate, low blood pressure, and fainting.^{1,2}
 - Some benzodiazepines can last for a long time and build up in the body, which can increase the risk of side effects.⁴
 - Benzodiazepines should be used with caution when taking other medications that cause drowsiness, such as opioid pain medications, as this can lead to overdose, hospitalization, and possibly death.
- Drug Abuse
 - Benzodiazepines can be addictive and lead to severe mental and physical addiction.
 - Most people that become addicted are prescribed the medication.⁷
 - Benzodiazepines have caused over 10,000 deaths in 2018 in the United States alone.⁸
- Other Safety Information
 - There is little evidence that shows benzodiazepines are helpful for treating PTSD and may even worsen symptoms.
 - Alcohol should NOT be used when taking benzodiazepines

What are some examples of benzodiazepines?

- Ativan® (lorazepam)
- Xanax® (alprazolam)
- Klonopin® (clonazepam)
- Librium® (chlordiazepoxide)
- Restoril® (temazepam)
- Valium® (diazepam)
- Halcion® (triazolam)

What if I am taking a benzodiazepine and want to stop?

If a person has been taking a benzodiazepine for a long time they can develop dependence. When this happens, stopping the medication suddenly can cause withdrawal and you can experience tremors, sweating, upset stomach, vomiting, headaches, muscle pain, heart problems, seizures, and even death.²

If the prescriber stops a benzodiazepine, the dose should be slowly lowered over weeks to months to reduce the likelihood of withdrawal symptoms.⁹



Go online to find more information about benzodiazepines and to view the references for this toolkit.

cpnp.org/390124

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