



BENZODIAZEPINES FOR ANXIETY & INSOMNIA

This handout contains information about the dangers of taking benzodiazepines for anxiety and insomnia. Primary care providers (PCPs) prefer to prescribe safer options that are listed on this handout. Please consult your PCP to determine which options are most suitable for you.

WHAT ARE BENZODIAZEPINES?

Benzodiazepines are agents that have sedative and anxiolytic effects. They are often prescribed to help people cope with anxiety and insomnia.

Examples: alprazolam (Xanax), lorazepam (Ativan), clonazepam (Klonopin), diazepam (Valium)

HOW DO THEY WORK?

Benzodiazepines slow down the nervous system by altering the activity of chemicals in the brain. This influences cognitive function, emotions, memory, and body movements. They can treat muscle spasms, seizures, and alcohol withdrawal.

They are meant to be short-term remedies for anxiety and insomnia.

CONTROLLED SUBSTANCE

Because of their potential for addiction and misuse, benzodiazepines are controlled substances that are tightly regulated.

Those dependent on benzodiazepines are often not “addicts”, but people who use their medication as prescribed.

PCPs HESITATE TO PRESCRIBE THEM

Benzodiazepines quickly alleviate anxiety and insomnia but work for only a few days. They cause rebound anxiety and insomnia (occur during withdrawal and are more severe than original symptoms), depression, mood swings, personality changes, impaired memory and cognitive function, and loss of motivation. These are more difficult to treat than the original problem.

ADVERSE EFFECTS

- Abuse, tolerance & dependence
- Impaired physical function and cognition
 - Fatal falls & hip fractures (especially elderly)
 - Higher rates of motor vehicle accidents
 - Do not improve after discontinuation of benzodiazepines
- Delirium (especially elderly)
- Increases mortality
- Increases blood pressure in the elderly
- Increases risk of Alzheimer’s disease
- Increases risk of non-Alzheimer type dementia

EFFECTIVE & SAFER ALTERNATIVES

Anxiety

Fluoxetine (Prozac)
Paroxetine (Paxil)
Venlafaxine (Effexor)
Buspirone (Buspar)
Hydroxyzine (Atarax)

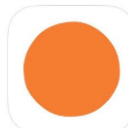
Insomnia

Doxepin (Sinequan)
Ramelteon (Rozerem)
Trazodone (Oleptro)
Hydroxyzine (Atarax)
Melatonin

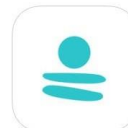
Non-medical therapies great for both anxiety and insomnia: psychotherapy, CBT, smartphone apps



Calm



Headspace



Simple Habit



Insight Timer