

UVM ScholarWorks

Updating Evidence-Based Patient Education Resources for Sleep: Sleep Hygiene and Benzodiazepine Discontinuation

Item Type	Presentation;Presentation
Authors	Geraci, Carolyn;Fritz, Madeline
Download date	2026-05-15 08:16:55
Item License	http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/
Link to Item	https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14849/2385

Benzodiazepines (“Benzos”) for Insomnia in older adults: What you should know

What is a benzodiazepine?

- Class of medications that are known as sedative-hypnotics
- Prescribed for conditions such as anxiety or panic attacks, seizures and sometimes for sleep
- Examples: Alprazolam (Xanax), Diazepam (Valium), Clonazepam (Klonopin)
- *The American Board of Internal Medicine Foundation Choosing Wisely Campaign recommends against use of benzodiazepines for those 65 years or older*

Test your knowledge (true or false):

- 1) This medication is the best option to treat my insomnia
 - a) True
 - b) False
- 2) This medication has only mild side effects
 - a) True
 - b) False
- 3) Without this medication, I will likely have a lot of difficulty sleeping
 - a) True
 - b) False
- 4) This medication can be addictive
 - a) True
 - b) False
- 5) My body does not change in the way it processes medications throughout my life
 - a) True
 - b) False

Answers:

- 1) False, there are many other ways to address insomnia
- 2) False, there are many side effects (listed below)
- 3) True, as your body is probably dependent on it. However, this can be overcome by slowly coming off the medication.
- 4) True, benzodiazepines have significant risk of addiction
- 5) False, as we age, our body changes how it processes medications. This can mean that we are more prone to side effects

Questions to ask yourself:

- Do you feel tired or groggy during the day?
- Do you ever feel “hangover” in the morning, even though you have not been drinking?
- Do you ever have problems with your balance?
- Do you ever have problems with your memory?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, your benzodiazepine may be contributing.

Benzodiazepines have many **side effects**, including:

- Addiction or dependence
- Cognitive deficits
- Increased risk of falls and fractures
- Increased risk of car crashes
- Feeling “hangover” the next day

So, what can you do to come off your benzodiazepine?

- Do not abruptly stop taking your medication
- **Talk to your doctor about a safe way to slowly reduce your dose**
- There are many other ways to help with insomnia
 - See “Sleep Hygiene” handout for more information

References:

ABIM Foundation (2019, September 17). Geriatrics - benzodiazepines in older insomniac adults: Choosing wisely. Retrieved February 17, 2021, from <https://www.choosingwisely.org/clinician-lists/american-geriatrics-society-benzodiazepines-sedative-hypnotics-for-insomnia-in-older-adults/>

Beers MH, Ouslander JG, Rollinger I, Reuben DB, Brooks J, Beck JC. Explicit criteria for determining inappropriate medication use in nursing home residents. UCLA Division of Geriatric Medicine. Arch Intern Med. 1991 Sep;151(9):1825-32. PMID: 1888249.

Olfson M, King M, Schoenbaum M. Benzodiazepine Use in the United States. JAMA Psychiatry. 2015;72(2):136–142. doi:10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2014.1763

Tannenbaum C, Martin P, Tamblyn R, Benedetti A, Ahmed S. Reduction of Inappropriate Benzodiazepine Prescriptions Among Older Adults Through Direct Patient Education: The EMPOWER Cluster Randomized Trial. JAMA Intern Med. 2014;174(6):890–898. doi:10.1001/jamainternmed.2014.949