



BENZODIAZEPINES MEDICINES AND THE RISKS OF ADDICTION, DEPENDENCE AND WITHDRAWAL.

This safety leaflet is to help support you in using benzodiazepine medicines safely. Please keep it in a safe place. Patients, family, friends, and carers can play an important role in the safe use of these medicines and in reducing the risk of harm. Please share this information with them.

What are benzodiazepine medicines and what are the risks I need to be aware of?

This leaflet provides information for patients who have been prescribed benzodiazepines to treat conditions such as anxiety and insomnia. They are often prescribed for periods of up to 4-weeks. This advice does not apply to patients who receive benzodiazepines for treatment of their epilepsy. Examples of benzodiazepines include diazepam, lorazepam, clobazam, temazepam and nitrazepam.

Benzodiazepines have serious risks of **addiction, dependence and withdrawal reactions**. Patients can become physically dependent on benzodiazepines, which means you might experience withdrawal signs and symptoms after stopping your medication or significantly reducing the dose you are taking. Drug addiction is a combination of behavioural, mental and physical factors, that may include a strong desire to take the drug and difficulties in controlling drug use. Although related, addiction and dependence are different and someone who is physically dependent on a drug is not necessarily addicted to it.

The healthcare professional who prescribed the benzodiazepine or your pharmacist should explain how long it is safe for you to take your medicine for and how to safely stop taking it.

For further information on using benzodiazepine safely, and a full list of possible side effects, read the Patient Information Leaflet (PIL) that came with your medicine, and keep it handy.

How can I take my benzodiazepine medicine safely?

Only take the medicine as directed by your healthcare professional.

- **Do not** increase the dose, take an extra dose or take for a longer period than prescribed.
- **Do not** take any other medicines to “top up” your symptom control. Benzodiazepines can be dangerous in combination with other substances, such as opioids or alcohol.

Taking more medication than prescribed can cause overdose.

If you have any questions about your benzodiazepine medicine or side effects, or if you do not understand how to take your medicine, talk to the person who prescribed your medicine, your doctor, or to a pharmacist. **Keep talking** to them about your symptoms – there may be different treatments that can help.

- **Do not allow others** to take any benzodiazepine medicines given to you. Your medicine has been prescribed or specifically recommended for you by your prescriber and can be dangerous if taken by other people – it could even cause fatal overdose.
- **Always keep medicines out of sight and reach of children.**

Taking too much benzodiazepine medicine is called an overdose, whether it is intentional or not. This can be very serious and may cause death.

If you think that you or someone else has taken too much of their benzodiazepine medicine, dial 999 immediately.

How do I know if I'm becoming addicted?

Addiction can happen gradually. It can make you feel that you are no longer in control of how much medicine you need to take or how often you need to take it. You might feel that you need to carry on taking your medicine, even when it doesn't help with your symptoms. Dependence is different and you may not realise you are physically dependent.

If your symptoms are becoming difficult to manage, or you feel that the same dose of your medicine is having less of an effect, **talk to your doctor**. This may mean you are developing tolerance to the effects of this medicine or are becoming addicted to it.

Signs that you may be addicted to benzodiazepines include:

- Craving for the medicine.
- Feeling that you need to take more medicine than prescribed, taking it more frequently or more than instructed on the pack – even though the medicine is causing unwanted effects on your overall health.
- Feeling that you need to take additional medicines to achieve the same relief.
- Taking benzodiazepines for other reasons than why they were prescribed.
- Experiencing withdrawal side effects when you stop taking the medicine suddenly.

If you notice any of the above, talk to your doctor or pharmacist.

When and how can I safely stop taking my benzodiazepine medicine?

Do not stop taking or reduce the dose of your medicine suddenly, as this may cause unpleasant withdrawal side effects. It is important to get the right help and support when it is time to stop taking your medicine.

Talk to your doctor, nurse or a pharmacist. They will be able to help you to come off your benzodiazepine medicine slowly to reduce unpleasant withdrawal side effects. Safely coming off benzodiazepines can take a long time (e.g. weeks or months). Every person is different. Take any unused benzodiazepines back to a pharmacy for safe disposal.

Withdrawal side effects may include a combination of the following:

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| • Headache | • Muscle pain | • Anxiety |
| • Depression | • Sweating | • Convulsions |
| • Confusion | • Restlessness | • Loss of sense of reality |

If you experience any of these, talk to the person who prescribed your medicine or a pharmacist. In an emergency, **dial 999**.