

SOME TIPS WHEN YOU ARE COMING OFF BENZODIAZEPINES

- ◇ INFORM YOUR DOCTOR THAT YOU WANT TO COME OFF BENZODIAZEPINES AND ASK FOR A WITHDRAWAL PLAN. TO AVOID RISK DO NOT TRY TO COME OFF THEM ON YOUR OWN.
- ◇ Wait until any life crisis has passed and your level of stress is as low as it can be.
- ◇ Consider starting the reduction whilst on holiday, when you have less pressure from work or family.
- ◇ You may have difficulty sleeping for a time when coming off the tablets. Try to anticipate and accept this.
- ◇ Consider telling family and friends that you are coming off benzodiazepines. They may give you encouragement and support.
- ◇ Consider joining a local self-help group. They can provide you with advice and support from other people who have come off benzodiazepines.
- ◇ Your original anxiety symptoms may return. Attending an holistic therapy programme or joining an anxiety management group may help to ease these. If symptoms persist or are severe, your doctor may advise you on other treatments available.
- ◇ If you are taking other addictive drugs in addition to benzodiazepines, then you may need specialist help to come off these. Your doctor will be able to advise you about this, or refer you to local services which can help.



IF YOU HAVE CONCERNS ABOUT BENZODIAZEPINES PLEASE CONTACT YOUR DOCTOR OR LOCAL PHARMACIST FOR ADVICE AND SUPPORT

INFORMATION AND OTHER AVAILABLE SERVICES CAN BE ACCESSED THROUGH THE HELPLINE AND WEBSITES BELOW



HSE Drugs & Alcohol Helpline 1800 459 459
www.hse.ie

Northwest Regional Drug and Alcohol Task Force
www.nwdrugtaskforce.ie

Drug and Alcohol Information and Support in Ireland
www.drugs.ie

Narcotics Anonymous in Ireland
www.na-ireland.org

Benzodiazepines Concerns?

Do you take sleeping tablets, anti-anxiety medication e.g. diazepam (valium); xanax; serepax; mogadon; rohypnol?

What you need to know

WHAT ARE BENZODIAZEPINES?

Benzodiazepines are a group of medicines which are sometimes used to reduce anxiety, promote sleep or act as a muscle relaxant.

Common examples include diazepam (Valium), Xanax and Rohypnol. Some types, such as temazepam and nitrazepam (Mogadon) are also used as sleeping tablets.

Zolpidem and zolpiclone are other sleeping medication. They are not benzodiazepines but they work in a similar way.

When you first take benzodiazepines, they are usually very good at helping you sleep and easing the symptoms of anxiety.



WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU TAKE BENZODIAZEPINES LONG-TERM?

Tolerance

If you take a benzodiazepine regularly, the body and brain often become used to it after a few weeks.

It gradually loses its effect and higher amounts are needed to achieve the same effect. This is called 'tolerance'.

Dependence

There is a good chance that you will become dependent on a benzodiazepine if you continue to take it for more than 4 weeks. This means that withdrawal symptoms occur if the tablets are stopped suddenly.

Withdrawal symptoms could include;

- ◇ Fits/seizures
- ◇ Anxiety, panic attacks, odd sensations i.e. feeling as if you are outside of your body or just feeling awful
- ◇ Sweating, unable to sleep, headaches, tremors, feeling sick, palpitations, muscle spasms and being oversensitive to light, sound and touch
- ◇ In some cases the withdrawal symptoms seem like the original anxiety symptoms

You may end up taking medication to prevent withdrawal symptoms. Because of 'tolerance' the benzodiazepine is no longer helping the original anxiety symptoms.

STOPPING LONG-TERM USE OF BENZODIAZEPINES

Don't stop suddenly. If you have been taking a benzodiazepine for over 4 weeks and want to come off it, it is always best to discuss this with your doctor or local pharmacist.



Your doctor will advise you that it is often best to reduce the dose of the medication gradually over a number of weeks before finally stopping it.

Your doctor will work with you to decide how best to reduce the dose for you so that withdrawal symptoms can be kept to a minimum.

With the supervision of your doctor a gradual reduction of the dose over a number of weeks will usually work.