



# Benzodiazepines (Benzos)

## Medication Safety & Risks

Presented by the PDATF Healthcare Task Force

### What Are Benzodiazepines?

Benzodiazepines, also referred to as "benzos" are a type of sedative used to treat a variety of disorders and for medical procedures. These medications are highly addictive and only meant for short-term use, as prescribed by a doctor.

The effects of benzodiazepines may be felt within an hour and can last from hours to several days depending on the type of benzodiazepine (short, intermediate or long acting).

#### Safety

Extra care is needed when taking a benzodiazepine because it can cause sleepiness and affect your concentration, lasting into the following day.

- **Avoid alcohol** while you are taking benzodiazepines.

- Benzodiazepines are likely to **affect your concentration and ability to drive**, putting yourself and others at risk.

- **Other medications you take** may make sleepiness and impaired concentration symptoms worse.

- Benzodiazepines can also cause muscle weakness, putting you at an **increased risk of falls.**

#### Common Benzodiazepines

Valium (diazepam)  
Xanax (alprazolam)  
Klonopin (clonazepam)  
Ativan (Lorazepam)

#### Questions For Your Provider

Are there any food and drinks I will need to avoid?

- How will this drug interact with my other prescriptions?

- Can I take this medication with my vitamins and herbal supplements?

- How long will I need to take the medication?

- Are there any side effects when stopping the medication?

- Will my symptoms return when I stop taking the medication?

- How will the medication help my symptoms?

### Benzos Are Addictive

Long-term use of benzodiazepines can be physically and psychologically addicting, in a way similar to that of opioids (i.e., Oxycontin, Vicodin, etc.) and Cannabinoids (i.e., marijuana), according to research done by the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

**Benzos are generally not recommended for long-term use. Talk with your doctor.**



# Risks & Side Effects of benzodiazepines



## What are the risks?

If used as prescribed and recommended, benzodiazepines are effective medications. However, there are risks and side effects, particularly if they're not used properly, or are used for more than a few consecutive weeks. Long-term use can lead to dependency and/or a substance use disorder.

### Risks Include

Dependence	Impaired judgement
Blurred vision	Memory loss
Depression	Confusion
Lack of motivation	Drowsiness
Irritability	Difficulty sleeping, or disturbing dreams
Aggression	Breathing difficulties
Delirium	Withdrawals (which can lead to seizures and death if not managed correctly)
Sexual Dysfunction	
Perceptual Hallucinations	
Impulsivity	

### Dependency and Withdrawal

When prescribed by your physician these medications are useful for short-term use. Physical dependence can develop as a result of long-term, daily use.

Physical signs of dependence include a need for a higher or an earlier dose to achieve equal results, and uncomfortable withdrawal symptoms when missing or skipping a dose.

Benzodiazepine withdrawal can be particularly dangerous and even life-threatening. Talk to your provider when stopping use.

The likelihood of an overdose is increased if benzodiazepines are taken with other depressant drugs such as alcohol, or opiates such as Vicodin, Percocet, or heroin.

### Proper Disposal and Storage

Do not share your prescription medications with anyone. It is illegal and unsafe.

Lock up all medications or put them out of the way of anyone, including children or pets, who might try to consume them by accident or on purpose.

Find your nearest medication disposal bin:  
<https://bit.ly/34lwGF6>

### Resources



For more information and support,  
call **2-1-1**

**Access & Crisis Line: (888) 724-7240**

or visit **UP2SD.org**

Learn more about the  
Prescription Drug Abuse Task Force at **SDPDATF.org**