

FACTS ABOUT BENZODIAZEPINES

WHAT ARE BENZODIAZEPINES

Also known as benzos, tranx, sleepers, sleeping pills, downers, pills, xannies, serras, moggies

Medicinal brand names

There are about 30 different types. Most common are temazepam, nitrazepam, diazepam (Valium), oxazepam, clonazepam and alprazolam.

Benzodiazepines are a group of depressant drugs, which doctors usually prescribe for the treatment of stress, anxiety or insomnia. They can also be prescribed for alcohol withdrawal. It is easy to become dependent on these drugs, especially if taken daily for more than two weeks.

EFFECTS OF BENZODIAZEPINES

How are they used

Benzodiazepines come in tablet or capsule form and are usually swallowed. It can also come in liquid form. However, some people crush the tablets for smoking or snorting, or dissolving in a solution for injecting. Effects depend on the person (age, weight, size, health and tolerance), as well as the duration, the amount taken, how it is taken and if it is used with other drugs, including alcohol. Effects can be felt 30 minutes to one hour after taking, and wear off between 3 to 4 hours.

Short-term effects, desired or undesired, may include...

- drowsiness and sedation, a feeling of calmness
- euphoria, reduced anxiety
- blurred vision, dizziness, slurred speech, loss of balance or coordination
- headache, nausea, loss of appetite, dry mouth
- diarrhoea or constipation
- shallow breathing, decreased heart rate, tremors, fatigue
- nosebleeds and nasal passage damage (from snorting)
- tetanus, infection, vein damage and scarring, Hepatitis B or C, HIV, AIDS, deep vein thrombosis and blood clots which can result in limb loss, damage to organs, stroke and possibly death (from injecting or sharing needles).

Long-term effects may include...

- impaired thinking or memory loss, personality changes
- confusion, anxiety and depression
- changes in emotional responses – unable to feel normal highs and lows
- irritability, paranoia, aggression, mood swings
- weakness, lethargy, muscle weakness
- menstrual irregularities, reduced sex drive
- fatigue and difficulty sleeping
- headaches, nausea, skin rashes, weight gain
- benzodiazepines dependence.

OVERDOSE

Effects from overdosing: very slow breathing, trouble breathing, blurred or double vision, slow heartbeat, cold clammy skin, lips may appear blue, unconscious, death. Chances of overdose are higher if taken with other depressant drugs such as alcohol or opiates such as heroin.

If a person is experiencing an overdose or is unresponsive call 000 for an ambulance. If unconscious, put them in the recovery position. If not breathing, start CPR. Paramedics won't involve police unless the person is a danger to themselves or others.

HOW LONG DO BENZODIAZEPINES STAY IN YOUR SYSTEM?

It depends on the type – they can be short or long acting. Generally, it can be detected 1 to 10 days in urine or longer, 2 days in saliva, 1 to 2 days in blood, and 90 days in hair.

TIPS FOR REDUCING RISK

Before: get a prescription from the doctor and follow medical advice. Try not to take it for more than 4 weeks. Check with your GP or pharmacist before using other medicines with it, or let your GP know if experiencing negative effects. If taking it for non-medicinal use, take a friend with you and tell them what you are taking and plan how you are getting home (to avoid driving under the influence).

During: only take the prescribed dose or if using without a prescription, take a low dose and wait to see effects before taking a bit more, don't take too much, too often.

Avoid: mixing benzodiazepines with other drugs, including alcohol, exceeding your maximum daily dose, sharing your medication with others, continuing use while experiencing negative effects, stopping taking them suddenly, injecting (can badly damage veins or cause clotting).

ARE BENZODIAZEPINES BECOMING A PROBLEM?

It may be a problem if you agree with any of these statements:

- I struggle to limit or reduce the amount of benzodiazepines I'm taking
- I often feel strong urges to take benzodiazepines
- I'm unable to perform tasks at work, school or home due to using benzodiazepines
- I have developed a tolerance to benzodiazepines, so I need to have more to feel effects
- I have withdrawal symptoms – anxious, agitated, dizziness, confusion, depressed, palpitations, insomnia, stomach and muscle cramps, over-sensitive to light, sound and touch, overheating and excessive sweating, seizures.

TIPS FOR PROBLEMATIC BENZODIAZEPINES USE

- seek support from a health professional, as well as from family and friends
- don't suddenly stop taking benzodiazepines – have a doctor help you withdraw gradually
- avoid people, places, objects, feelings or situations associated with taking benzodiazepines
- start doing activities you enjoy that don't involve taking benzodiazepines
- look after yourself – get enough sleep, follow a healthy diet, adopt a balanced lifestyle
- set some personal goals.

BENZODIAZEPINES AND THE LAW

It is illegal to use or possess benzodiazepines without a prescription from a doctor, or to sell or give benzodiazepines to someone else for recreational use. In Queensland, it is illegal to possess needles or syringes if they are not disposed of safely and therefore pose a risk to others.

FOR SUPPORT – CALL DRUG ARM

CALL DRUG ARM CENTRAL INTAKE ON 07 3620 8880 DURING BUSINESS HOURS TO ACCESS FREE SUPPORT OR EMAIL INTAKE@DRUGARM.COM.AU. FOR GENERAL INQUIRIES, CALL 1300 656 800 OR EMAIL INFO@DRUGARM.COM.AU.

FOR 24/7 SUPPORT CALL:

ALCOHOL & DRUG INFORMATION SERVICE: 1800 177 833 (QLD) AND 1800 250 015 (NATIONAL).