

# REDUCING HARM FROM BENZODIAZEPINES

- Only ever take benzodiazepines as prescribed by your doctor, and do not take more than prescribed
- Benzodiazepines are best used as short-term medication
- Try not to use daily benzodiazepines for more than two weeks, to reduce your risk of becoming dependent and experiencing withdrawal when you stop
- If you have been on benzodiazepines for a long time, or are on a high dose, it is recommended that you cut down gradually rather than suddenly
- Seek advice from a doctor or drug and alcohol service before cutting down
- Do not mix benzodiazepines with other drugs, especially other depressant drugs such as alcohol and opiates, as your risk of overdose and death increases

## WHAT IF YOUR FRIEND PASSES OUT?

- If the person is unconscious, check their airway is clear, place them on their side and into the recovery position.
- Call an ambulance on 000 and stay with them.
- If breathing has stopped and there is no pulse, start applying CPR if you are trained.

## USEFUL PHONE NUMBERS

Emergency **000**  
DirectLine **1800 888 236**  
Drug Info **1300 858 584**  
North and West Metro Alcohol  
and Other Drug Service Intake  
**1800 700 514**  
Suicide Helpline **1300 651 251**  
Family Drug Help **1300 660 068**  
Reconnexion **1300 273 266**  
North West Mental Health Triage  
**1300 874 243**

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health treating team, drug and alcohol worker or  
GP.



**Benzodiazepines**

**AND  
YOUR  
MENTAL  
HEALTH**

**S+** **sumitt**  
SUBSTANCE USE & MENTAL  
ILLNESS TREATMENT TEAM

# BENZOS AND YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

## What are Benzodiazepines?

Benzodiazepines are legal drugs prescribed by doctors for a range of reasons, commonly anxiety, alcohol withdrawal and insomnia. They are also known as minor tranquilizers, but this does not mean that they are mild or harmless.

## Types of Benzodiazepines?

Benzodiazepines are often called “benzos” or “sleepers”. There are different kinds that vary in strength and how long they last in your body. Each type has two names – the generic drug name and the brand name used by each drug company that manufactures the drug.

## Benzodiazepines and your mental health

- Although benzodiazepines are often prescribed to provide short-term relief for anxiety, paradoxically they can increase anxiety and depression
- People using high doses are at greater risk of memory impairment and impulsive behaviour that they may later regret
- Anxiety and depression can be a symptom of withdrawal from benzodiazepines and can occur between doses as a symptom of withdrawal

## Benzodiazepines and other drugs

- Using benzodiazepines with any other prescribed, over-the-counter, or illicit drug may be dangerous
- Combining benzodiazepines with other depressants such as alcohol or opiates such as heroin, methadone or morphine can lead to overdose and death
- Always tell your doctor what drugs you use to make sure you use benzodiazepines safely

## What happens when you stop using Benzodiazepines

If you have been using benzodiazepines regularly, you may experience withdrawal symptoms. Physical withdrawal from benzodiazepines may last from a couple of weeks to months, depending on the amount being used and the length of time it has been taken.

The most common withdrawal symptoms are difficulty sleeping and anxiety.

## HOW DO BENZOS AFFECT YOU?

- In small doses they have a calming effect, while in higher doses they help people to sleep
- Common effects include; short-term relief from anxiety, muscle relaxation, tiredness, sleep, reduced coordination and impaired judgment
- Other common effects include; dizziness, fuzzy thinking, poor memory, and uninhibited behaviour (doing things you would not normally do)

## Benzodiazepines and Pregnancy

- Benzodiazepines may cause problems during pregnancy, but should never be stopped suddenly.
- Seek medical advice immediately if you become pregnant while using benzodiazepines

## Benzodiazepine use and the law

It is illegal to give your medication to another person, or use someone else’s medication.

## Commonly used benzodiazepines include:

- **Temazepam** (e.g. Normison and Temaze)
- **Diazepam** (e.g. Valium and Ducene)
- **Oxazepam** (e.g. Serepax and Murelax)
- **Alprazolam** (e.g. Xanax and Kalma)
- **Nitrazepam** (e.g. Mogadon)

## Other common withdrawal symptoms include:

- Loss of appetite
- Tiredness
- Sweating
- Irritability
- Confusion and hallucinations
- Tremors
- Feelings of unreality or detachment
- “Electric shock sensations”
- Headaches
- Convulsions and seizures

If you are dependent on benzodiazepines It is important to withdraw from benzodiazepines under medical supervision.

*“Changes are not easy but they’re possible and sometimes necessary” - SUMITT Consumer Consultant*