

Going Beyond **BENZOS**

WHEN TO WORRY ABOUT BENZO USE?

- “ Have you taken a BNZ for 4 months or longer?
- “ Have you increased the dose or felt the need to?
- “ Have you tried to cut down and couldn’t?
- “ Do you feel sick or anxious if you miss a dose?
- “ Are the effects of BNZ interfering with your life?
- “ Are you drinking or using drugs with your BNZ?
- “ Are you very concerned about missing a dose?
- “ Do you feel like you need it to get through the day?
- “ Do you take extra pills to help you cope with stress?
- “ Are you afraid of leaving home without your meds?



Note: If you answered yes to more than one of the questions above you may be benzodiazepine dependent.

LONG TERM EFFECTS OF BENZODIAZEPINES

- Skin rashes and weight gain
- Memory issues , difficulty thinking, and confusion
- Anxiety, depression and mood swings
- Irritability, paranoia and aggression
- Lack of motivation, lethargy and weakness
- Insomnia and “jitteriness”
- Fatigue, drowsiness and sleepiness
- Personality changes
- Lack of balance /coordination, increased fall risk
- Birth defects if pregnant
- Headaches
- Nausea, constipation and diarrhea
- Problems driving or operating machinery
- Higher risk of dementia
- Increased risk of death

The Mental Health Center of Greater Manchester

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Assisting individuals in recovery from benzodiazepine misuse



Benzodiazepines are a temporary solution to issues with anxiety and insomnia. Although they provide quick relief, they do not cure the problem and can have unwanted and harmful effects.

WHAT ARE BENZODIAZEPINES?

Benzodiazepines (ben-zoh-die-az-uh-peens) are a group of medications that are used for a variety of issues, like insomnia, muscle spasms, and anxiety. They’re also called “benzos”, BNZ, tranquilizers, sedatives and hypnotics.

Some examples are Alprazolam (Xanax), Clonazepam (Klonopin), Diazepam (Valium), Lorazepam (Ativan) and Temazepam (Restoril).

WHY ARE THEY PRESCRIBED?

Most prescriptions for benzodiazepines are given to help someone cope with anxiety or insomnia, often related to personal problems. They can also be prescribed for other reasons, such as seizures, muscle spasms, detox from alcohol, and before medical procedures.



HOW DO BENZODIAZEPINES WORK?

Benzodiazepines slow the nervous system down by changing chemicals in the brain. This affects emotions, memory, thinking, and body movement. One dose of the medication can last from one hour to many hours.

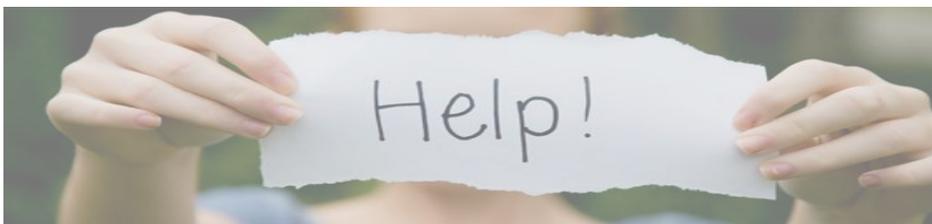
Benzodiazepines are useful as a short term treatment for issues with anxiety and insomnia. However, in some cases they can make a problem worse, for example with PTSD-related anxiety.

Research shows that if these meds are taken regularly for more than a few weeks, a person may become dependent on them.

CAN I BECOME ADDICTED?

Most people who take benzodiazepines are not misusing them, just following their prescriber's directions. But even at low doses, people can become dependent on them to function, even after just one month. Over time, changes happen in the body that cause a person to have uncomfortable and possibly dangerous symptoms if they stop the medication.

In addition to the body needing the medication, a benzodiazepine user can become tolerant to its effects. This is when someone needs to have more and more of a medication to have the same effect. Some research has shown that this can happen after four months.



OTHER RESOURCES:

- **211 Helpline** - Dial 211 in NH
- **Partnership for Drugfree New Hampshire** — www.drugfreenh.org

Resource Guides:

<https://www.dhhs.nh.gov/dcbcs/bdas/documents/resource-guide-treatment.pdf>
<https://www.dhhs.nh.gov/dcbcs/bdas/documents/resource-guide-consumers.pdf>

HOW WILL I FEEL IF I STOP?

Withdrawal symptoms, like anxiety and depression may be very similar to the reason why the medication was prescribed in the first place. How bad the symptoms are varies person to person. It is also affected by which specific medication was used, the amount taken, the length of time it has been used and whether it is stopped quickly or slowly.

Withdrawal symptoms may begin immediately or may be delayed after decreasing or stopping the medication. The timing is affected by what type of medication is being taken and how long it stays in the body.



WE CAN HELP YOU TO STOP TAKING BENZODIAZEPINES

If you have been on a benzodiazepine for too long, you may be nervous about stopping it. The choice to stop is an important one and you should understand the benefits and risks for you. Talk to your healthcare provider before making your decision.

Don't Just Stop - People who take a benzodiazepine regularly are at risk for uncomfortable side effects and withdrawal when they try to stop quickly or "cold turkey." Stopping slowly will give you the best chance of success!

Plan Ahead – Talk to your provider about your plan to cut back and eventually stop taking the medication. If you are on more than one medication in this family, you will probably need to stabilize on just one before you can start to reduce your medication. The process can take as little as a few weeks, but for others getting off benzodiazepines can take months.

Meds Are Not Enough – Even with a good tapering schedule in place to cut back on withdrawal symptoms, going without meds can cause some people anxiety. This is why it is very important that you get involved in therapy to learn new ways of dealing with that anxiety. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy or CBT is one type of therapy that has proven helpful in managing sleep problems, depression, anxiety and chronic pain.