

Benzodiazepines

Benzodiazepines are depressant drugs commonly prescribed to relieve anxiety and sleep problems. They work by slowing down the activity of the central nervous system and the messages going between the brain and the body. Benzodiazepines are known by their generic (chemical) or brand name. In each case, the medication is exactly the same, usually made by different companies. Some common benzodiazepines include:

Generic name	Brand name	Generic name	Brand name
Alprazolam	Xanax®	Diazepam	Valium®
Chloridazepoxide	Librium®	Lorazepam	Ativan®
Clonazepam	Klonopin®	Temazepam	Restoril®

Street Names: Benzos, Downers, Nerve Pills, Tranks

Effects of benzodiazepines: 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). Some of the effects that may be experienced with low to moderate doses include:

• Memory loss, difficulty thinking clearly	• Confusion, depression, blurred vision
• Drowsiness, feeling tired or weak	• Dizziness, change in balance, falling over
• Headache, dry mouth, nausea, vomiting	• Loss of appetite, diarrhea, constipation

Higher doses of benzodiazepines can result in over-sedation and may produce an effect similar to alcohol intoxication. Feelings of jitteriness, excitability, reduced alertness, and headache are often experienced as the effects of large doses wear off. A very high dose of benzodiazepines can cause:

• Slow, shallow breathing	• Unconsciousness or coma
• Death (more likely when taken with other depressant drugs such as alcohol)	

Some of the long-term effects of benzodiazepines include:

• Memory loss, difficulty thinking clearly	• Drowsiness, weight gain
• Anxiety, depression, lack of motivation	• Difficulty sleeping or disturbing dreams
• Skin rashes, weakness, fatigue	• Irritability, paranoia, aggression

Taking benzodiazepines with other depressant drugs: 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. It also increases the risk of breathing difficulties.

Driving: Driving ability may be affected by benzodiazepines. You may not notice that your driving is affected until you find yourself in a situation where you need to respond immediately and appropriately such as to avoid an accident.

Tolerance and dependence: Long term use of benzodiazepines can be physically and psychologically addicting. Tolerance often develops after long term use requiring larger doses to achieve the desired effect. Physical dependence occurs when a person's body adapts to a drug and becomes used to functioning when the drug is present. People who are psychologically dependent on benzodiazepines crave the drug and feel as though they can't cope without benzodiazepines.

If you are concerned about your or someone's benzodiazepine use, contact your health care provider, help is available.