

BENZO CHECK



The purpose of Benzo Check is to provide you with some useful information and practical tips around benzodiazepines (often called benzos). It should only take about 10-15 minutes to complete.

WORKER'S NOTES

This tool is designed to help guide a conversation with someone about their benzo use. It is not intended to replace a full clinical intervention.

Please consider all risk, safety, consent and confidentiality issues before commencing. If now is not a good time, this resource can be taken away and read at a later date. A guide to using this tool can be found at www.insight.qld.edu.au

NAME:

DATE:

START HERE!



DID YOU KNOW...

- Benzodiazepines are central nervous system depressants. This means that they slow down messages travelling between the brain and the body.
- They are commonly prescribed for anxiety, alcohol withdrawal and difficulty sleeping.
- Commonly used benzos are diazepam (Valium), temazepam, oxazepam (Serepax) and alprazolam (Xanax).
- They are recommended to be used for short periods of time.
- The risk of overdose increases when benzos are taken alongside other depressants (such as alcohol or opioids).

BENZOS CAN BUILD UP IN YOUR BODY

- Different benzos stay in your body for different amounts of time.
- This depends on the "half-life" - the time it takes for half the benzo dose left in your body to be processed and removed from your body.
- Benzos with a longer half-life will stay in your system for longer. A benzo with a shorter half-life can lead to a more intense withdrawal.



BENZOS CAN AFFECT YOUR MOOD AND MEMORY

HOW WOULD YOU RATE YOUR MEMORY?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

HOW WOULD YOU RATE YOUR MOOD?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10



WHAT ARE THE GOOD BITS ABOUT USING BENZOS?

TOP TIP

It's good to know the reasons why you use benzos. It affects where, when, how much and how often you use it.

WHAT ARE THE NOT-SO-GOOD BITS?

e.g. low mood, not getting things done, forgetting things, anxiety, depression, relationship problems, money problems, hassles with work/study, getting busted, losing license.



SEVERITY OF DEPENDENCE SDS SCALE?

Record the answer that best represents your personal feelings towards your benzodiazepine use over the previous twelve months.

	Never or almost never (0)	Sometimes (1)	Often (2)	Always or nearly always (3)
Did you ever think your benzodiazepines use was out of control?				
Did the prospect of not using benzodiazepines make you anxious or worried?				
How much did you worry about your use of benzodiazepines?				
Did you wish you could stop using benzodiazepines?				
How difficult would you find it to stop or go without benzodiazepines?				

If you scored 7 or more it is likely that you are dependent on benzos. (Cuevas C, Sanz E, de la Fuente J, Padilla J, Berenguer J. 2000).

TOTAL

/15

Turn the page over for more information

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WAYS TO REDUCE HARM

WHILE WE UNDERSTAND THAT YOU MIGHT NOT BE THINKING ABOUT CHANGE, IT IS GOOD TO KNOW HOW TO STAY SAFE WHILE YOU ARE STILL USING.

1. Set limits on how much you will take.
2. Put your benzos away after you have taken your dose.
3. Collect your benzos daily from a pharmacy or use a daily dosing box.
4. Don't take other depressants such as alcohol or opiates with benzos.
5. Use around people you trust, in a safe place.
6. Avoid injecting as this can cause vein damage, infections and overdose.
7. Crush up and dissolve under your tongue instead of injecting.
8. If injecting, use your own sterile equipment and a wheel filter.
9. Do not drive or operate machinery whilst you are taking benzos.



TOLERANCE

Tolerance is needing to use more to get the same effect. Benzodiazepine tolerance can develop within 2-4 weeks of regular use. If you experience this, contact a health professional - do not increase the dose yourself.



BE AWARE OF INTERACTIONS

Mixing benzos with alcohol and opioids can lead to overdose and death. Vitamin B12 can make withdrawal symptoms worse. Benzos may react differently with other medications and foods. Speak to a medical professional for more information.



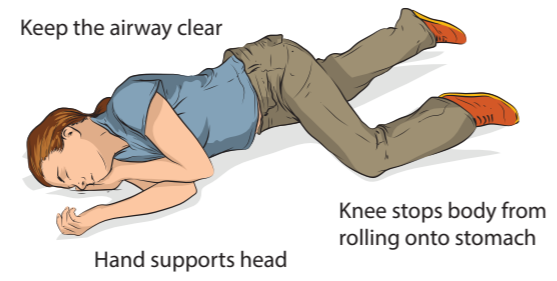
MIND YOUR HEAD

Long-term use of benzos can lead to depression and an increase in anxiety and insomnia.

RESPONDING TO AN OVERDOSE

Some of the signs of an overdose include:

- person is unable to be woken (sedation)
- trouble breathing or slow breathing
- altered mental state
- weakness
- uncoordinated muscle movements
- blue lips, skin and fingertips
- stupor
- confusion and disorientation
- coma.



Seek assistance immediately by calling triple zero (000) and ask for 'AMBULANCE'. If someone is unconscious and breathing, turn them on their side in the recovery position.

If they are not breathing, perform CPR if you are able to, and wait with them until help arrives.

Don't confuse sleep with loss of consciousness. If someone cannot be woken up, it is likely that they are unconscious.

WARNING

Benzo withdrawal can trigger seizures. Follow a structured plan created with a medical professional when cutting back or stopping use.

ARE YOU IN YOUR SENIOR YEARS?

If you are in your senior years benzos can increase your risk of falls, confusion and memory difficulties.

ARE YOU PREGNANT?

If you are pregnant or planning a pregnancy, seek medical advice. Benzo use should not be stopped suddenly during this time.

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THINKING ABOUT CUTTING BACK OR QUITTING?

CONSULT A MEDICAL PROFESSIONAL IF YOU ARE THINKING ABOUT CUTTING BACK OR QUITTING

- It is not recommended to cut back or stop using benzos on your own. Do NOT stop using without seeking help from a medical professional.
- Suddenly stopping benzos can make you experience withdrawal symptoms.
- Withdrawal symptoms of benzos can mimic symptoms of anxiety that the medication has been prescribed to treat.
- Slowly reducing your benzo use over time can be effective in reducing withdrawal symptoms.
- If you experience a change in mood or see, feel or hear things that are not real when withdrawing from benzos, seek help from a medical professional.
- If you are using more than one benzo, a medical professional can work with you to help you safely reduce your benzos.
- If you are struggling to reduce or quit at home, your local AOD service will be able to help identify additional support available.

HERE ARE SOME OTHER TIPS

DEVELOP A PLAN – By planning for your care and recovery needs during benzo withdrawal you can reduce your levels of anxiety and stress.

REASONS – Write down why you want to quit or cut down. This could include money, relationships, health benefits etc.

SUPPORT – Make sure you have as much support as possible. Try thinking of people who can support you. Look at alternative ways of improving sleep and managing anxiety.

CUES – Avoid things that will make you feel like using, such as places, people, stressful situations. This is especially important in the beginning.

CRAVINGS – Be prepared. These are uncomfortable but they will pass.

- Delay** making a decision on whether or not to use for 5 minutes, half an hour, or longer.
- Distract yourself** e.g. phone a friend, go for a walk, listen to music.
- Deep breathing** and other relaxation techniques can help you stay calm.

WHAT TO EXPECT - WITHDRAWAL

You can sometimes feel worse before you feel better. Withdrawal symptoms (insomnia, anxiety, depression, restlessness, muscle pains, twitching, seizures) are common after use of benzos.

Stopping benzos can lead to "rebound anxiety" which is when anxiety comes back and feels much worse than before.

REMEMBER

- Change takes time but it is important to take things slow.
- People can make successful change around their benzo use.
- If you are trying to quit, sometimes it can take a few attempts. Learn from any slip ups and keep going.
- Learn new strategies and get support to do this.

WHERE TO GO FOR MORE HELP...

Call the national Alcohol and Other Drug Hotline for free, confidential, 24 hour telephone counselling, advice and referral.

1800 250 015

MY PLAN FROM HERE IS...