

Benzodiazepines

Ways to reduce harms



Firstly, a few key things to know about benzos...

- Benzos are commonly prescribed for anxiety, difficulty sleeping and to assist with withdrawal from certain substances (e.g. alcohol).
- You can build a rapid tolerance to benzos (e.g. within 2-4 weeks).
- Different benzos stay in your body for different amounts of time. Benzos like diazepam (e.g. Valium®) will take longer to take effect and then taper off slowly. Benzos like alprazolam (Kalma®/Xanax®) or temazepam (Temaze® or Temtabs®) will peak and then drop off faster and, as a result, can lead to a more intense withdrawal if used regularly.
- Benzos affect your memory. At high doses they can cause blackouts where you can't remember what you said or did. In these states, people can sometimes re-dose multiple times because they don't remember taking their last one. This can greatly increase the risk of overdose.
- The risk of overdose also increases when benzos are taken alongside other depressants such as alcohol or opioids. They can also increase risk of falls and accidents.

It's important to know that there is no safe level of non-prescribed benzodiazepine use.

The following questions refer to non-prescribed benzodiazepine use only.

Would you try any of these strategies below? (or maybe you do them already?)	Yes	Maybe	No
Setting limits on how much you will use each day/week/month?			
Delaying your first benzo until after you have finished certain jobs/tasks/activities or at a certain time of the day?			
Putting your benzos away after you have taken a dose to deter or prevent redosing?			
Collecting your benzos daily from a pharmacy or using a daily dosing box to help with monitoring your use?			
Using a physical reminder of how many benzos you have taken e.g. putting the empty blister pack in a bowl or jar?			
Not taking (or limiting use of) other depressants (e.g. alcohol or opioids) with your benzos?			
Avoiding injecting benzos as this can cause vein damage, infections and overdose? (NB: it is better to crush up and dissolve benzos under your tongue instead of injecting)			
Only using in a safe place, and having someone around (or someone you could quickly contact) if you find yourself in trouble who is able to get help in an emergency?			
Not driving or operating machinery if feeling impaired from benzo use?			
If you have benzos at home, storing them safely out of reach of children and pets?			
Having 2 benzo-free days per week? NB: unless physically dependent on benzos – if so, see warning below			
Having a break for 2 weeks or more semi-regularly? NB: again, unless physically dependent on benzos - see warning below			

WARNING



If you have been using benzos daily for a long time, we recommend seeking medical advice before stopping or cutting back to avoid severe and/or dangerous withdrawal.

Withdrawal is different for everybody and can last up to 10 days. Common symptoms of benzo withdrawal include aches, twitching, nausea, headaches, agitation, rebound anxiety, depression, restlessness, insomnia, feelings of unreality and nightmares. Severe benzo withdrawal can cause confusion, paranoia, hallucinations and seizures - this requires urgent medical attention.



Benzos and Driving

Benzos can reduce your ability to drive safely. It's also difficult to know how much your driving skills have been affected or how long benzos remains in your system. Fatigue, hangovers or come-downs from drugs can also affect your driving skills.



Do you use regular medications?

Sometimes benzos can affect how these medicines work. Check the medicine packet and/or ask your doctor.



Accidents

Try strategies to help prevent accidents or bad experiences from occurring, such as avoiding high-risk environments when under the influence (traffic, waterways, heavy machinery, or areas where an overdose or accident may go unrecognised).



Practice safe sex

Carry and use condoms and access regular STI testing, especially whenever you start having sex with a new partner.

Are you pregnant, breastfeeding or parenting?

Using any substance when planning a pregnancy, pregnant, or while breastfeeding can affect your baby's body and brain development. Talk to a medical professional for advice, especially if considering detoxing whilst pregnant.

Substance use can affect your children and others around you. Ensure your children remain safe and supervised at all times. Make a plan prior to drinking and be prepared for the hangover in advance.

Note: Sleeping with a child in the same bed while under the influence of benzos poses significant risks and dangers.

If you are pregnant, do not detox from benzos until you have spoken to a medical professional as detoxing may harm your baby.

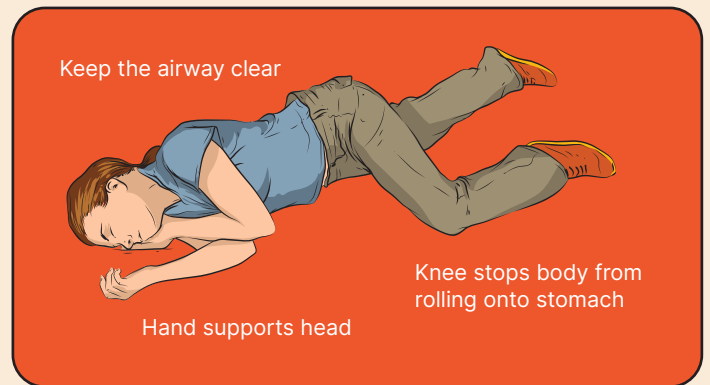
Responding to a benzo overdose

Signs of a benzo overdose include:

- Extreme confusion / agitation
- Cannot be woken up
- Very slow breathing, choking, snoring or gurgling
- Blue lips, skin or fingertips
- Very low body temperature
- Vomiting, especially while unconscious
- Seizures

If this occurs, seek assistance 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 they are unconscious.

Unfortunately, there's no way to reverse a benzo overdose. The effects have to wear off with time.



What would be signs that your benzo use is becoming a problem? When would you know it's time to take a break and/or seek help?

