

# Understanding Dementia: Benzodiazepines

## What are Benzodiazepines?

Benzodiazepines or Z-drugs work by slowing down your brain activity. This has the effect of making you feel drowsy or calm.

These medications are often prescribed to treat anxiety and sleep problems.

Are you currently taking any of the following medications? They are benzodiazepines and Z-drugs. Ask the pharmacist or doctor if you are not sure:

Alprazolam	Chlordiazepoxide
Bromazepam	Clonazepam
Clobazam	Diazepam
Clorazepate	Lorazepam
Fulurazepam	Nitrazepam
Midazolam	Temazepam
Oxazepam	Zolpidem
Triazolam	
Zopiclone	



## Safety First

Healthcare providers are concerned about people taking benzodiazepines over long periods of time. These medications can cause harmful side effects, including falls, fractures and memory problems.

They can also be physical and psychologically addictive.

Stopping this medication suddenly can cause unpleasant and even dangerous side effects. Contact your healthcare provider to develop a plan to reduce the dose very slowly.

## Did You Know?

Benzodiazepines are among the most prescribed medications in Canada, especially for older adults.

Anxiety and sleep problems can sometimes be caused by depression. Thorough assessment should be done to ensure the right treatment if offered.

## Should older adults take this medication?

**Usually no.** Doctors are advised to avoid prescribing these medications to older adults whenever possible.

If prescribed, they shouldn't be taken longer than 4 weeks in a row. They can have dangerous effects on health and well-being of older adults.

Benzodiazepines should be avoided in older adults in most situations. Taking the drug for 3-6 months raised the risk of development of Alzheimer's disease by 32% (Harvard Health Publishing, Medical School).

## Health Risks

Older people who take benzodiazepines are more likely to have problems with:

- Drowsiness
- Clumsiness
- Falls
- Fractures
- Confusion
- Trouble breathing
- Problems driving

Information has been gathered from: Canadian Coalition for Senior's Mental Health.

For more information, please contact us:



1-800-565-4614



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