

## Reducing Harm & Finding Help, Continued

Many people seek treatment for benzodiazepine addiction. In fact, the number of people seeking treatment for benzodiazepine addiction tripled between 1998 and 2008.

Benzodiazepine addiction can be treated in a residential setting (often called “rehab”) or in an outpatient setting (when the patient lives at home, but goes to treatment appointments 1-7 times per week). Effective types of counseling for benzodiazepine addiction include cognitive behavioral therapy, motivational interviewing, and



twelve-step facilitation. There are also recovery support groups and online forums that can help people struggling with benzodiazepine addiction.

Narcotics Anonymous, Alcoholics Anonymous, and groups like SMART Recovery or LifeRing are all available to support people with benzodiazepine addiction. Recovery apps specific to benzodiazepine addiction can be downloaded to your smart phone that provide lists of recovery support meetings, reading material, tools like sobriety counters, and more.

## Benzodiazepines



## Information about Your Health



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## Benzodiazepines – What Are They?

Benzodiazepines are a category of prescription drugs that slow down the brain and body. They are prescribed to some people with anxiety, panic attacks, and sleeping trouble because of their relaxing effect. Benzodiazepines are also used non-medically by people intending to get high.

Specific benzodiazepines are often referred to by their brand names such as Xanax, Ativan, and Valium.

## Benzodiazepines & My Health

### Shorter Term

*Intoxication:* Benzodiazepines can weaken coordination, memory, and judgment. The risks of benzodiazepine use are similar to those of alcohol, including accidents, injuries, and unhealthy decisions. At higher doses, benzodiazepines can cause delirium and blackouts.

*Overdose:* Because benzodiazepines slow down the central nervous system (CNS), taking too many can slow the body to a stop and



## Benzodiazepines & My Health, Continued

cause death. However, the biggest overdose risk of using benzodiazepines is using them in combination with other drugs that slow the CNS. Alcohol, prescription painkillers called opioids (for example, Vicodin, Norco, or Percocet), and heroin are all CNS depressants. Combining these drugs can lead to overdose death.

### Longer-Term

*Addiction:* Benzodiazepines have addictive potential. Not everyone who uses benzodiazepines becomes addicted, but some do. One reason that benzodiazepines can cause addiction is because they create tolerance. As a patient becomes more tolerant to the effects of benzodiazepines, larger doses are needed to achieve the intended effect (such as better sleep or less anxiety). Tolerance can contribute to an addiction.

People who stop using benzodiazepines can experience withdrawal (when the body feels sick without them). Depending on how long and what dose a person has used, benzodiazepine withdrawal can be difficult and long-lasting.

*Other health issues:* There are a number of health issues associated with long-term benzodiazepine use, including memory problems, difficulty with balance, sleep apnea (when you stop breathing while asleep), depression, and lower bone density. People who inject benzodiazepines can

develop injection site infections, damage to their veins, hepatitis B or C, HIV, and blood clots.



## Reducing Harm & Finding Help

Many people use benzodiazepines safely and as they are prescribed. If you have health concerns related to a benzodiazepine prescription, talk with your doctor. There are other approaches to treating anxiety and sleep disorders.

People who use benzodiazepines can reduce their risk of harm by not mixing benzodiazepines with other drugs, especially CNS depressants. Most overdose deaths involve more than one drug. Benzodiazepines are a major factor in the increase in prescription drug overdoses since 2000. While naloxone (also called Narcan, the drug used to stop opioid overdoses) does not counter the effects of benzodiazepines, it can still prevent death in people who overdose as a result of using both drugs.

People who wish to stop using benzodiazepines should be aware that withdrawal can be difficult and in some cases, dangerous. Physicians, detox facilities, and addiction treatment programs can help with withdrawal.