



For further information:

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Benzodiazepines

Benzodiazepines

Benzo's, Valium, diazepam, vallies, blues, minor tranquillisers, tranx

What do they look like?



What are Benzo's?

Benzo's are a group of synthetic chemicals that act as depressants on the central nervous system. They are sub divided into, anxiolytics, hypnotics, sedatives and anti-convulsants. They also work as muscle-relaxants.

The first benzo was produced in 1954 by Austrian scientist Leo Sternbach, and was marketed by Hoffman La Roche as Librium in 1960. Valium followed 3 years later.

The discovery of these first tranquillizers was heralded as the dawn of an age without anxiety.

There are currently over 25 benzodiazepines available by prescription in Western countries.

In Britain, benzo's are still the most commonly prescribed medication.

Many heroin or methadone users have come to know benzos intimately, either as a booster for their gear, or as part of a home detox.

What will they do to me?

They are used for the treatment of anxiety, insomnia, convulsions, alcohol withdrawal symptoms, muscular disorders, as pre-meds before surgery and in veterinary medicine.

Anxiety is a state created by an anatomical and biochemical circuit in the brain called the limbic system. It is a very old and difficult to define, area of the brain that is present in evolutionary simple animals as well as in the more recently developed 'higher' animals, such as humans.

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Benzo's work by boosting the neurotransmitter GABA's ability to decrease the activity of many groups of nerves in the brain and spinal column. This slowing or reducing of messages to nerves in the limbic system will then reduce the reaction time to anxiety producing events. So, we have a reduction of the nerve activity in the spinal cord and limbic system which will produce muscle relaxation and, via the limbic system, relief from certain fears and anxieties.

Side effects can include drowsiness, dizziness, blurred vision, confusion, depression, dependency and more.

Many people today use benzo's illicitly as part of a pattern of poly-drug use, assisting and easing comedowns when people often feel anxious and stressed.

When do they become a problem?

Today, massive medical documentation clearly shows that dependence is a common complication in the use of benzo's. Debate continues however; with some doctors and scientists still maintaining that the only adverse effect of chronic benzo use is dependence and possible withdrawal symptoms when the drugs are discontinued.

Others have found a clear link between poor mental health of long term users including chronic depression, OCD (Obsessive Compulsive Disorder), personality changes and phobias.

Physical or psychological dependence can develop very quickly with these drugs and it seems that some people are more susceptible to dependence than others. Withdrawals are reactions to the absence of benzo's in the body, usually following high doses or long term use of the drug. These

reactions, most frequently jitteriness, tremors, anxiety, insomnia, strange tastes and smells, tinnitus, panic, sweating, cramps, and under extreme conditions, convulsions (seizures), can all indicate physical dependence on the drug. Post-withdrawal symptoms can last from several weeks, months, even longer and continued support may be required to prevent relapse.

Benzo's used to be liberally prescribed. There is now a strong movement toward reducing and stopping people using benzo's. If this is done insensitively and without the active and willing cooperation of the patient in a therapeutic partnership, the consequences of withdrawal can be severe.

Staying safer

- Diazepam should be used with caution in people with impaired liver or kidney function (such as hepatitis C)
- Sedation, including slowing down breathing and heart rate may be enhanced by other drugs like heroin, methadone, neuroleptics (drugs for epilepsy) and alcohol.
- Benzo's should not be used alone to treat bereavement, depression or anxiety that's associated with depression.
- Avoid reducing the intake of a benzo like Valium rapidly or overnight if you have been taking them for more than one month.
- If you are prescribed benzo's try and take them as recommended by your prescriber.

The Law

Benzodiazepines are Class C, schedule 4 drugs.

Penalties

Possession: up to 2 years imprisonment and a fine.

Supply or Production: up to 14 years imprisonment and a fine.