

BENZODIAZEPINES and PTSD

If you have PTSD and take Valium, Xanax, Klonopin, Ativan or another anti anxiety drug, here is what you need to know:

- Why it is important to decrease your use of benzodiazepines
- How you can discontinue them with your doctor's help
- Who should be particularly concerned about these medications
- What your treatment options are



"Some of you may be questioning yourself – if I reach out for help and get treatment will it help me? I am a living testimony that it helped me. But there are some caveats here and this is, first of all you need to want the help. Secondly, you need to embrace the help. Thirdly, if medication is suggested be willing to utilize the tools given to you. Be willing to fully participate in your own recovery."

Robert Murphy
US Army (1966 1969)
1st Lieutenant / 1Lt, Infantry Unit Commander
Vietnam

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BENZODIAZEPINES OVERVIEW

Benzodiazepines are prescription medications that have been around for over 50 years. They have commonly been prescribed to patients with a diagnosis of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Benzodiazepines may help in the short term and make you feel better quickly, but we now know that they do not improve the overall symptoms of PTSD and their helpful effects do not last.

If you have been taking these medications for over a month, it is important for you to know that there are serious side effects associated with their continued use. The good news is that there are benefits to stopping them. **If you have tried to stop before, it is worth trying again with your doctor's supervision and support.** In this brochure, you will learn how to decrease your use of benzodiazepines and about other treatments for PTSD that can help you get better.

Did You Know?

- Benzodiazepines do not help your PTSD
- There is evidence that benzodiazepines can cause harmful side effects for some patients
- There are better treatment options for you - just ask your health care provider

Side Effects of Benzodiazepines

There are harmful side effects with the continued use of benzodiazepines.

- Memory and thinking problems
- Morning “hangover” or grogginess
- Physical dependence
- Difficulty sleeping without medication
- Withdrawal symptoms if stopped suddenly
- Falls/accidents

Who’s at Risk?

It is also important to know that there are some people with PTSD who are more at risk for these harmful side effects.

- Patients who have had a concussion (TBI) or other type of head injury
- Patients with a history of substance use disorder
- Patients who are on opioids for chronic pain or other sedative medications
- Patients over 60 and women who are on other sedative medications may also be at increased risk for adverse side effects.

If you fall into one of these categories, you should ask your doctor to help you decrease your use and suggest other treatment options.

Helpful Ways to Decrease Your Use

There are ways that your doctor can help you decrease your use of benzodiazepines.

- Your doctor may switch you to a different medication that will make it easier for you to decrease your use gradually.
- Your doctor may also reduce your dosage of the medication that you are currently taking.
- Your doctor may put you on a taper schedule that decreases your use over time until you can stop the medications.

Do not STOP or change any medications you are currently taking without first discussing it with your doctor.

Benefits of Stopping Benzodiazepines

- Improvements in alertness, memory, and mood
- Decreased risk of falls and accidents
- Better able to benefit from cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)

Better Treatment Options

If you have been considering benzodiazepines for your PTSD or for your anxiety or insomnia symptoms, there are better treatment options available. Below you will find a list of effective treatment options.

PTSD

Psychotherapy Treatment Option(s): Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT), Prolonged Exposure (PE), Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR)

Medication option(s): Antidepressants and Effexor

Anxiety

Psychotherapy Treatment Option(s): Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), CBT for Anxiety

Medication option(s): Antidepressants and Effexor

Insomnia

Psychotherapy Treatment Option(s): Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for insomnia (CBT-I) is highly effective. Other forms of CBT may be helpful.

Medication option(s): low dose trazodone, prazosin, amitriptyline, doxepin, or benadryl

For more information visit www.ptsd.va.gov

Or contact your local evidence-based treatment coordinator: