

## THE PROBLEM WITH ANTI-ANXIETY MEDICATIONS AND SLEEPING PILLS: HANDOUT

Dr. Kelly Gardiner PhD, PMHNP, CNS, BC (2021)

**\*\*some** of this information applies to people in nursing homes\*\*

**Anti-anxiety medications:** Valium, Xanax, Ativan, Klonopin, Librium, Valium, and some sleeping pills (Ambien)

**You are being given this article to read for one of the following reasons:**

—You are a patient who has been taking an anti-anxiety pill, for sleep or nervousness, and you don't see the need to

wean off this medication.

—You took a friend's Xanax and it worked great for you

—you are on a sleeping pill

—you care for someone taking these medications

**Common side effects of these medications are as follows:**

—memory and concentration problems

—increased risk of being tired during the daytime

—increased risks of a hip, wrist, or other fracture from a fall

—increased risk of aspiration (breathing in food or stomach fluid while you are sleeping or eating) causing pneumonia

—Increased impulsivity (doing things you wouldn't normally do)

—increased risk of **death (risk doubles if on a narcotic with this medication)**

—increased risk of **traffic accidents**

—increased risk of **dementia**

—**Physical and/or psychological dependence/addiction**

—**needing a higher dose** over time because your body gets used to it

—using an extra pill and running out of medications early (which could cause seizures)

—rebound side effects, these medications often last 4 hours so between doses you may start to feel worse and **need another dose closer together**

**Anti-anxiety medications may hide a serious and/or life-threatening condition such as:**

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—**Low Blood Sugar** (symptoms of hypoglycemia can seem like anxiety or agitation yet what the person really needs is urgent medical attention and something with sugar in it) If you have diabetes, check your sugar during a period of anxiety or panic attack.

—**Lack of Oxygen** called "hypoxia" (people with COPD or lung problems such as pneumonia, emphysema, or asthma can appear anxious or aggressive NOT due to anxiety but due to lack of oxygen to the brain speeding up the heart and indicating the need for urgent medical attention)

—**Waking up with a panic attack** (get your heart checked by a cardiologist usually with a cardiac monitor that you wear for a few days, find out if you have sleep apnea which causes "panic attacks" when waking up)

—Getting **random panic attacks** could be a heart condition where your heart races for no reason which makes you feel in a panic.

—**Depression** (antidepressants treat depression and anxiety, not anti-anxiety pills which merely put a bandage on the symptoms instead of helping the brain chemistry regulate and heal itself)

—elevated **thyroid levels, low iron, low B vitamins, etc. (get a good medical workup, don't assume it is psychological, rule out medical first)**

**Anti-anxiety medications can be helpful in some circumstances such as:**

—before an MRI or other test that may be uncomfortable,

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someone would drive you to the test and stay with you until the test is done and the medication has worn off

—End of life care

—in people with dementia or cognitive impairment, before taking a shower if fearful or going to the dentist

**There are safe alternatives to anti-anxiety medications to treat various mental health conditions:**

—Antidepressants (treat anxiety, panic attacks, obsessive-compulsive disorders, agitation, aggression, depression, and insomnia)

—Mood stabilizers (treat restlessness, excessive pacing, aggression, mania)

—Anti-psychotics (newer types are available with minimal side effects)

—therapy is highly effective

—behavior modification plans from a psychologist

**Sleeping Pills (Z-Drugs)**

First, find out **why** you aren't able to sleep.

—Do you have restless legs or arms that have to keep moving to feel better?

—Do you WAKE UP at the same time every morning?

—Do you keep your house well-lit during the daytime?

—Are you avoiding alcohol and caffeine close to bedtime?

—Do the pills work so well that you feel great and energized all day?

—Did anyone tell you, you stop breathing while you sleep?

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Do you snore loudly, do you have a large neck? You might have apnea causing brain damage while you sleep and sleeping pills make this condition worse.

**IS THIS YOU?**

—you have been on several antidepressants (which may work for a while and then stop working) or never worked for you

—you have periods of sleeping about 4–5 hours a night and feel tired and awful yet you cannot sleep (other times you will sleep ok but still not feel good)

—feeling anxious, irritable, and depressed

—getting more angry than you should

—Xanax is the only pill that ever worked for you

**\*\*It takes about 15 years to get a proper diagnosis of Bipolar Depression which is not treated with antidepressants alone. Antidepressants don't work for this condition, you need a medication to **uplift and stabilize** your mood so that you feel calm, no longer depressed, or irritable, and sleep well at night.\*\* (do not confuse this with Bipolar I or manic depression, this means that when you go without sleep, you feel great and not tired) Get the right diagnosis and treatment and you should feel good once again.\*\*\***

**NEVER STOP these pills on your own, or try to wean off of them, without medical supervision. Withdrawal can result in seizures.**

For more information, go to: [BENZOeng.pdf](#) ([tapermd.com](#))