

Please bring this booklet with you to your next appointment

Benzodiazepines & PTSD: Do you know about this risky combination?

VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration
PBM Academic Detailing Service

This publication was developed in partnership with the National Center for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and the VA PBM Academic Detailing Service.

Adapted with permission from the supplement "You May Be at Risk" (Tannenbaum et al. JAMA Intern Med. 2014;174(6):890-898.)

Veterans Crisis Line
1-800-273-TALK (8255) or Text - 838255

National Center for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder
<https://www.ptsd.va.gov>



Test your knowledge about the benzodiazepine you are taking.

Benzodiazepines:

Alprazolam (Xanax®)
Clonazepam (Klonopin®)
Diazepam (Valium®)
Lorazepam (Ativan®)
Temazepam (Restoril®)



True or False?

	True	False
1) Benzodiazepines are the best option for treating my PTSD.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2) Benzodiazepines are safe because my provider has been prescribing them to me for many years.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3) I will not be able to handle stressful situations without benzodiazepines.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4) If I stop taking benzodiazepines, I can do it gradually.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Answers



FALSE

The safest and most effective way to treat your PTSD is with talk therapy or antidepressants. New information shows that benzodiazepines can be harmful, especially for people with PTSD.



FALSE

Taking benzodiazepines for over a month can lead to new health problems. Even when you take benzodiazepines as prescribed, they can become habit forming or you may need more for the same effect. Mixing benzodiazepines with alcohol or other medications puts you at risk for accidental poisoning.



FALSE

Your provider can work with you to find safer solutions for handling stressful situations. Taking benzodiazepines may not be helping as much as you think.



TRUE

Benzodiazepines can be safely stopped if the dose is slowly decreased over time. Do not stop them suddenly because it puts you at risk for withdrawal symptoms and seizures. You and your provider can work together to safely stop your benzodiazepine.

What are benzodiazepines?

- Benzodiazepines are medications used for anxiety or problems with sleep. However, they are only recommended for the short-term treatment (2-4 weeks) of severe anxiety, panic, or insomnia.
- They can be used in the long-term to treat or prevent seizures.
- Benzodiazepines include: alprazolam (Xanax®), clonazepam (Klonopin®), diazepam (Valium®), lorazepam (Ativan®), and temazepam (Restoril®).

What is wrong with taking benzodiazepines for PTSD?

- Benzodiazepines may quickly provide short-term relief from distressing feelings. However, they do not help you get better over the long-term. This is because they do not improve the overall symptoms of PTSD.
- Benzodiazepines can worsen PTSD symptoms, and may reduce the benefits of talk therapy.

What are some of the problems with benzodiazepines?



- Car accidents
- You can be arrested for driving while impaired



- Accidental poisoning - especially when combined with alcohol, strong pain medications (opioids), street drugs



- Birth defects
- Baby may need emergency care because of withdrawal symptoms



- Memory and thinking problems



- Unsteady walking
- Increased risk of falls, broken bones, head injuries



- Depression, mood changes, irritability, anger



- Feeling drowsy or tired

Do the risks of this medication outweigh the benefits to me?

Continue to the next page to do a quick self-assessment. ➡

Does this sound familiar?

- ☐ I wake up most mornings feeling groggy or as though I have a “hangover,” even if I have not been drinking
- ☐ I have trouble sleeping without medication
- ☐ I have problems with memory and thinking clearly



“Some of the side effects of Klonopin® that I experienced were odd things- feeling very depersonalized, feeling very foggy, feeling like I was misstepping with myself... I was very angry.”

-Leah Parady, Veteran
US Air Force

I am at greater risk if:

- ☐ I have had any type of head injury
- ☐ I have had problems with alcohol- now or in the past
- ☐ I have had problems with drugs or addiction – now or in the past
- ☐ I take strong pain medications (opioids) or sleep medication
- ☐ I am 65 or older

Did you check any of the boxes on this page?

Continue to the next page to find out what to do next.



**Benzodiazepines and PTSD are a risky combination.
To lower your risk, talk to your provider.**

Together, you and your provider can discuss a plan to:

- Put you on a schedule that slowly decreases your benzodiazepine dose over time
- Switch you to a safer treatment



Do not stop or change any medications you are taking without first discussing it with your provider. Stopping benzodiazepines too quickly can be dangerous.

There are better treatment options available.

Both talk therapy and medications other than benzodiazepines are better choices to treat your PTSD, anxiety, and/or insomnia.

Visit www.ptsd.va.gov/apps/decisionaid to compare PTSD treatments.

Benefits of stopping benzodiazepines:

■
Improvement in
alertness, memory,
and mood

■
Fewer falls and accidents
and
improved coordination

■
Better talk
therapy engagement
and results



.....

Studies show that many people who slowly stop benzodiazepines can stay off them and feel better.

.....



To begin making changes,
contact your VA provider.

“I’m off the
benzodiazepines.
It was a really, really
rough road.
I didn’t think I’d
make it,
but I did it.”

To see more success stories like Leah’s, visit www.ptsd.va.gov/apps/AboutFace

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Crisis Line
1-800-273-TALK (8255) or Text - 838255

VA PBM Academic Detailing Website
<http://www.pbm.va.gov/PBM/academicdetailingservicehome.asp>

National Center for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Website
<https://www.ptsd.va.gov>