

ASSIST

DRUG INFORMATION CARD

BENZODIAZEPINES



Street names

Benzos, downers, tranx, sleepers, Kalma, moggies, normies, roofies, seros, sleepers, temazzies, tranks, tranquillisers, v, vals, zanies.

Brand names include:

- Valium®
- Xanax®
- Serapax®
- Normison®
- Mogadon®

What are they?

Benzodiazepines are minor tranquiliser prescription drugs, that are primarily used to treat anxiety and insomnia. They are also used to treat epilepsy, alcohol withdrawal, and agitation in serious psychiatric disorders. They are legal if used as prescribed, but illegal to use if sold or provided to someone without a prescription. Illicit use of benzodiazepines is on the increase in Australia.

What does it look like?

Benzodiazepines are tablets and capsules that come in a variety of colours and shapes, depending on their brand. There are about 30 different types (generic names) of benzodiazepines.

How are they usually taken?

Swallowed but they can also be ground into a powder, mixed with water and injected.

Immediate effects

Within 30 minutes of swallowing benzodiazepines or almost immediately if they are injected, people can experience the following:

- A feeling of relaxation, sleepiness and lack of energy
- Dizziness
- Euphoria
- Confusion
- Visual distortions
- Moodiness
- Short-term memory loss

Long-term effects

Benzodiazepines can have many adverse physical and mental health effects if they are used for a long time.

Others include:

- Dependence
- Anxiety, irritability, paranoia, aggression, and depression
- Muscle weakness, rashes, nausea and weight gain
- Sexual problems
- Menstrual irregularities
- Memory loss, cognitive impairment, dementia and falls
- Confusion, lethargy and sleep problems.

ASSIST

DRUG INFORMATION CARD

BENZODIAZEPINES

Mixing benzodiazepines with other drugs

Mixing benzodiazepines with other depressant and sedative drugs that slow down the central nervous system (i.e. alcohol, heroin, GHB and pharmaceutical opioids) increases the risk of dying from an overdose. Benzodiazepines are involved in approximately a quarter of all heroin overdose deaths in Australia. Some heroin users will use benzodiazepines as a substitute if heroin and other opioid drugs are not available.

Benzodiazepines are also used by methamphetamine, ecstasy and related drug users, to help them relax, sleep or come down when they are recovering from the effects of stimulant drugs. Depending on how much is used the combination of mixing stimulant drugs with benzodiazepines can have unpredictable adverse effects.

Other things to consider about benzodiazepines

- Benzodiazepines are addictive and should only be taken on a short-term basis.
- Tolerance and withdrawal can occur within 2-3 weeks of regular (daily) use.
- Different types of benzodiazepines work in the body for different lengths of time - diazepam (Valium) has a long action and can stay in the blood for up 3 days
- People who use high doses of benzodiazepines or use them for a prolonged period of time should seek medical advice before tapering down or stopping use – benzodiazepine withdrawal can be life threatening (i.e. seizures).
- Common symptoms of withdrawal are insomnia, anxiety and irritability. Other symptoms can include headaches, nausea, tremors, sweating, loss of appetite, visual and hearing disturbances, digestive disturbances, hallucinations.

- The chance of a fatal overdose on benzodiazepines is greatly increased if the person is using it in combination with depressant drugs, such as alcohol, heroin and opioid pain medications.
- Using high doses of benzodiazepines during pregnancy can cause the baby to be born with poor muscle tone and feeding ability, drowsiness and low body temperature.
- Injecting benzodiazepines can have serious effects on veins.

Harm reduction advice for benzodiazepines

- Do not mix benzodiazepines with other depressant drugs (alcohol, GHB, opioids, heroin) as this greatly increases the chance of a fatal overdose.
- If you want to cut down or stop using benzodiazepines, please speak to a medical professional first.
- If injecting benzodiazepines, ensure you filter your mix and use clean injecting equipment.
- Because benzodiazepines can cause drowsiness, confusion, and slowed reaction times it is dangerous (as well as illegal), to drive while affected by benzodiazepines.