

23. SIDE EFFECTS OF BENZODIAZEPINE USE



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Introduction. BZDs are a class of psychoactive drugs known for their depressing effect on the central nervous system (CNS). Given the continuous increase in anxiety and sleep disorders over decades, BZDs remain the most prescribed class of drugs in the world. However, with this continued, widespread use comes the dark reality of BZD addiction and many side effects. This is worrying and requires attention.

Aim of study. It is to review the indications, the duration of treatment, to expose the adverse effects to long-term administration.

Methods and materials. We reviewed articles published in the last 10 years in Pubmed, Google Scholar, and specialized psychiatric books to gain a better understanding of what are the indications, and what are the side effects of long-term treatment.

Results. BZDs have significant side effects. According to several studies, the use of BZD increases with age, with long-term use being most prevalent in the 65-year-old and older population. Passaro et al. described an increased risk of falls in elderly hospital patients who were prescribed short-acting BZD. Many studies have examined the effects of benzodiazepines on cognition leading to psychomotor retardation, amnesia, and increased forgetfulness. Discontinuation after long-term use (more than two weeks) has even shown some people inability to return to the cognitive baseline. It has been associated with an increased risk of dementia. Long-term use of BZD leads to negative changes in the microstructure of sleep in patients with insomnia. Regular use of BZD has been shown to be addictive. Symptoms of withdrawal should be treated carefully with prolonged-acting BZD, with doses decreasing slowly over time.

Conclusion. BZDs are effective in improving the conditions indicated above. However, due to the severe potential for addiction and adverse effects, the guidelines for the recommended use do not exceed 2-4 weeks.