

Talking with your patient about deprescribing benzodiazepines

Why Your Patient Could Benefit from Deprescribing

- **Feel better:** Patients who have depended on a benzodiazepine for several months or years will feel better mentally, emotionally and physically after the drug is eventually discontinued.¹
- **Trauma recovery support:** The risk of benzodiazepines in the treatment of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) outweighs potential short-term benefits and can worsen severity of symptoms, lead to aggression, depression and substance use, or even cause PTSD in patients with recent trauma.²
- **Tolerance:** With rare exceptions for severe panic disorders and social phobias, benzodiazepines can lose effectiveness with long-term use (i.e., greater than 3 months). Tolerance often leads to physical and psychological dependence.^{3,4}
- **Long-term harm:** Several adverse effects of long-term use should be considered, such as falls, bone fractures, motor vehicle accidents, poor memory and cognition, and risk of overdose or death when combined with an opioid.⁵⁻⁸

How to Successfully Deprescribe a Benzodiazepine

- **Start the conversation:** Begin with simple, open conversations about benzodiazepines.⁹ Ultimately, it is a positive provider-patient partnership that will help the patient successfully discontinue benzodiazepines.¹⁰⁻¹² Seek help for patients who misuse or abuse benzodiazepines, or who have alcohol or opioid co-dependencies before deprescribing.
- **It's a process:** It is likely to take several visits before a patient is ready to deprescribe. One visit may be used to broach the idea that benzodiazepines are not great long-term treatments. The next visit a deeper dive into why. Provide them an [educational brochure](#) about benzodiazepines. Steady progress toward a shared goal with the patient is ultimately best for everybody involved. This stepwise approach can really help get your patient onboard.¹⁰⁻¹³
- **Everyone is fully committed:** Both provider and patient should recognize that coming off a benzodiazepine is a challenge. If a patient is forced or persuaded to deprescribe against their will, it often leads to failure. If both provider and patient are sufficiently motivated, there is a very high probability of success.
- **Empower your patient:** Benzodiazepine deprescribing is a less frightening experience when the patient has some measure of control over the process. A sufficiently gradual and individualized taper makes the process better.

- **Set expectations:** An educated patient who confidently understands the cause and nature of withdrawal symptoms will find the deprescribing process much easier. A gradual taper will reduce withdrawal symptoms but may not eliminate them. Previous bad experiences with deprescribing are usually because the drug was tapered too quickly, and the patient did not know what to expect.¹
- **Go slowly:** A sufficiently slow taper of the benzodiazepine permits the neuroadaptive responses induced by the drug to regain control of their natural central functions. This healing process of the mind can take a long time, similar to slow physical healing of other parts of the body.¹
- **It's not a competition:** The rate of taper is not critical. Each person's experience with deprescribing is unique, and differs in type, quality, severity, time-course, and duration.¹
- **Help make it simple:** Some patients will benefit from using a pharmacy who can bubble pack. Pill boxes and smartphone medication reminder apps can also be helpful. Because bubble packs and pill boxes are not child-resistant, lock boxes are also available. Many patients may not have the means to access these tools and may need your help.

References:

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