

# Benzodiazepines & Sedatives

Benzodiazepines and sedatives are a group of substances that slow brain activity. They can cause drowsiness and sedation, and impair a person's coordination, memory, ability to respond, or operate a motor vehicle. Benzodiazepines and sedatives have the potential for misuse, physical dependence, and development of a substance use disorder.

## Mixing opioids with benzodiazepines or sedatives is dangerous.

Both opioids and sedatives slow and can stop breathing. Even when taking them as prescribed, benzodiazepines and other sedatives can increase the risk of overdose and death when used with opioids.



### Benzodiazepines

Also known as "benzos," these are medications with sedating, memory impairing and anxiety relieving effects. Some common benzodiazepines include alprazolam (Xanax®), clonazepam (Klonopin®), diazepam (Valium®), and chlordiazepoxide (Librium®). Benzodiazepines are prescribed for anxiety, panic attacks, muscle relaxation, alcohol withdrawal, and seizures.



### "Z Drugs"

Non-benzodiazepine sedative hypnotics, known as "Z drugs," are medications that slow brain activity. These include medications like zolpidem (Ambien®), zaleplon (Sonata®), and eszopiclone (Lunesta®). These medications are prescribed for sleep but are not meant for long-term use.



### Gabapentinoids

Gabapentinoids are sedatives used for the treatment of nerve pain and include drugs such as gabapentin and pregabalin (Lyrica®). These medications have been associated with an increased risk of accidents, unintentional overdoses, and suicidal behavior.



### Alcohol

Alcohol is a sedative that interferes with areas of the brain that control balance, speech, judgment, and memory. It can also slow thinking and breathing. Alcohol is dangerous when combined with other substances that cause sedation and slow breathing.

## What if I have an opioid use disorder?

People who take benzodiazepines or sedatives may still be treated with buprenorphine and methadone, because the risk of not treating their opioid use disorder with buprenorphine or methadone can be a greater harm to them. Although buprenorphine and methadone are safe and effective when used without other sedating medications, taking them with benzodiazepines or sedatives may increase the risk of overdose in some situations. Talk to your provider about creating a plan that meets your goals and lowers your risk of adverse effects.

## How can I safely reduce or stop use?

Discontinuation of benzodiazepine or sedative use is difficult, but possible. Stopping benzodiazepine use suddenly can lead to severe withdrawal symptoms, including irritability, difficulty sleeping, hallucinations and anxiety that can require hospitalization. Your health care provider can work with you to develop a plan that minimizes the withdrawal that you experience.