

# Managing Dental Anxiety - Benzodiazepines

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High dental anxiety may make dental appointments challenging. Anxiety may lead to discomfort, high blood pressure, heavy breathing, and increased heart rates. It can also cause difficulty controlling movement during dental procedures which may be unsafe. Working on the way you think about dental procedures and working on techniques to help calm yourself (such as breathing exercises) may help you lower your dental anxiety. If these techniques are not enough, your dentist may consider prescribing a medication. The most commonly prescribed medications used for dental anxiety are from a class of medications known as “benzodiazepines.” These medications include lorazepam, triazolam, alprazolam, diazepam, and others. This handout will help you understand the benefits and risks you should consider before taking benzodiazepines.

## **Are benzodiazepines safe?**

Benzodiazepines prescribed by a dentist are meant to improve your comfort and safety during the dental procedure. When taken in low doses and for short amounts of time, these medications are generally safe. However, it is important to understand that benzodiazepines have risks and their use should be limited. Take benzodiazepines **only** when needed, **precisely** as your dentist directs.

## **What are the risks of benzodiazepines?**

Overuse of benzodiazepines may lead to:

- Tolerance - this means people who use the drug need more of it to achieve the same effect.

- Dependence - this means that the body feels the need for the medicine and stopping it leads to withdrawal symptoms. Dependence may lead to **addiction** which is when this need interferes with daily life.
- Very low breathing rate which may lead to coma or even death. The risks increase when benzodiazepines are taken in combination with other medications that lower breathing rate such as opioid pain medications. Following are steps you must take to reduce risks if you are prescribed a benzodiazepine.

### **What can I do to reduce the risks of benzodiazepines?**

1. Make sure to tell your dentist all medications that you are prescribed as some medications may interact with benzodiazepines in ways that may be harmful.
2. Take medications as prescribed and **do not** increase doses unless your dentist directs. Lower doses of benzodiazepines help with anxiety, however, higher doses may decrease blood pressure or breathing which may lead to coma or even death.
3. Do not travel on your own after taking a benzodiazepine because it may make you feel disoriented.
4. Do not drink alcohol while taking a benzodiazepine. Combining alcohol and benzodiazepines may lower breathing which may lead to serious problems, including death.
5. Make sure that someone is able to monitor you and help you remain safe while using benzodiazepines.

Due to risks for abuse or misuse, including the use of the medication by someone for whom the medication was not prescribed, the providers at Michigan Medicine's Hospital Dentistry Clinic limit prescribing of benzodiazepines to quantities sufficient for one appointment. Also, the

prescriptions can be filled no earlier than two weeks from your scheduled appointment. This is for your safety.

### **Who should avoid taking benzodiazepines?**

Be sure to inform your dentist of all your medications and medical conditions. Benzodiazepines may interact with other medications you may be taking and these drug interactions may be harmful to you.

People with the following medical conditions should not take benzodiazepines:

- Allergies to benzodiazepines
- Narrow-angle glaucoma
- Pregnancy
- Severe lung disease (such as COPD or chronic bronchitis)
- Congestive heart failure
- Impaired kidney function
- Impaired liver function
- Depression
- Bipolar disorder
- Psychoses

This list is not exhaustive and other conditions may increase your risk for problems following benzodiazepine use. Your dentist and doctor may work together with you to determine if benzodiazepines are a safe option for you.

### **How can I dispose of unused medications?**


Benzodiazepines may be dangerous if used improperly. In order to reduce misuse of your prescription, please properly dispose of unused medications. Do not keep unused medications for later use.

The safest way to dispose of old medications is to take them to an authorized “Take-Back” program. Visit <http://michmed.org/5LWpZ> to find a location in

your area.

If you are not able to find a program in your area follow these steps as a last resort:

- Mix opioids (do not crush) with used coffee grounds or kitty litter in a plastic bag and put it in your household trash.
- Scratch out personal information on the prescription label and dispose of the original container.

 Do not flush opioids down the toilet.

For more information, please review the “Medication Disposal Guide” which may be found at <http://michmed.org/MmA6N>.

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