



PATIENT INFORMATION REGARDING BENZODIAZEPINES AND Z DRUGS

Benzodiazepines are medicines such as diazepam, temazepam and nitrazepam. Z drugs are medicines such as zopiclone and zolpidem.

INFORMATION FOR YOU REGARDING BENZODIAZEPINES AND Z DRUGS

Prescribers in this practice will prescribe benzodiazepines and Z drugs in line with national and locally developed guidelines:

First line treatment should be non-medication measures such as sleep hygiene (a good “go to bed” routine), Mindfulness, relaxation and mediation techniques. Further information can be accessed at MindWell [Sleeping problems - MindWell \(mindwell-leeds.org.uk\)](https://www.mindwell-leeds.org.uk); Leeds Mental Wellbeing Service <https://www.leedscommunityhealthcare.nhs.uk/our-services-a-z/leeds-mental-wellbeing-service/online-group-classes/workshops/sleep-well-session/>; Sleepio, as recommended by NICE <https://onboarding.sleepio.com/sleepio/nhs/120#1/1>

If this a new medication for you, we will only prescribe these medicines for a **maximum of 14 days** and at the lowest effective dose. The following guidance published by NICE (National Institute of Clinical Excellence which is the national guidance used by healthcare professionals in the UK) will apply (1):

- The reason the medication is started will be documented in your medical notes.
- Other possible causes of sleep disturbance will be recorded (eg. pain, chronic breathlessness, depression) and treated appropriately.
- If applicable, you will receive advice on non-drug therapies for anxiety and insomnia, available via text message.
- You will be advised on the potential problems of dependence (and addiction).
- A second prescription will not be issued without a follow-up appointment.
- Benzodiazepines or Z drugs should not be taken for more that 2–4 weeks (including reduction).

If being prescribed for back spasm (2)

- The prescriber can decide on a dose of diazepam 2mg up to three times a day when required to relieve muscle spasm. If necessary and appropriate, the dose can be increased up to 5mg three times a day. A short course (2–5 days) is recommended due to the risk of adverse effects and as this is a dependence forming medicine.
- Additional considerations regarding dose may be made by the prescriber, if you are elderly or frail due to the risks, in particular falls, associated with these medicines.

The practice aim is for patients who are already on a regular benzodiazepine or Z drug prescription to be assessed and if appropriate, counselled for a withdrawal scheme with the aim to gradually reduce the drug to zero, where appropriate.

If you need support outside of the practice to reduce the medication, via a managed withdrawal scheme, you may be advised to contact the substance misuse service (Forward Leeds). <https://www.forwardleeds.co.uk/>

If you have any further questions regarding this information including the ongoing management of your condition, then please arrange a routine appointment to discuss further with your prescriber.

If you are taking this medication regularly and you wish to reduce or stop it, please contact your GP practice to arrange a routine appointment with your prescriber to discuss further. **Please do not stop your medication suddenly as this may make you feel unwell.**



Prescriptions for benzodiazepines and Z drugs should not be routinely available on repeat prescription. However your prescriber recognises that there may be a small minority of people who need to be on small maintenance dose of benzodiazepine or Z drug. Examples are if you have or are:

- Severe mental health problems under the care of a psychiatrist.
- On benzodiazepines for the treatment of epilepsy.
- Seriously or terminally ill.
- Ensure you take the medication as prescribed. If you are taking these medicines for greater than 2-4 weeks you should not stop them suddenly as this may lead to withdrawal symptoms, which include rebound agitation, insomnia and fits. Please contact your GP practice for a consultation if you have any concerns regarding this.

Useful Information

Insomnia PIL

<https://www.choiceandmedication.org/leedsandyorkpft/generate/handychartinsomniauk.pdf>

Panic disorder pil

<https://www.choiceandmedication.org/leedsandyorkpft/generate/handychartpanicuk.pdf>

Diazepam pil

<https://www.choiceandmedication.org/leedsandyorkpft/generate/pilldiazepamuk.pdf>

link to choice and medication sight for all leaflets

<https://www.choiceandmedication.org/leedsandyorkpft/printable-leaflets/>

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POLICY FOR THE REQUEST OF BENZODIAZEPINES TO TREAT PHOBIAS, SUCH AS FEAR OF FLYING

Diazepam will not be prescribed for the treatment of phobias such as fear of flying. According to the BNF Diazepam is contra-indicated (not appropriate) to be prescribed for phobic states (3).

Benzodiazepines are only licensed short term for a crisis in generalised anxiety. If you are in crisis, you should be getting expert care and support for your mental health and not going on a flight.

Diazepam is a sedative, which means when prescribed it may cause you to feel sleepy and more relaxed. If there is an emergency during the flight, it may impair ability to concentrate, follow instruction and react to situations. This could have serious safety implications for you and those around you.

Many people find benzodiazepines like diazepam sedating; however an uncommon side effect (If 1,000 people are given the medicine, approximately 5 of them may get this side effect) is agitation, and a rare side effect is increased aggression. This may cause you to behave in a way in which you wouldn't normally. A change in behaviour may negatively impact on your safety as well as that of other passengers.

We appreciate that fear of flying is very real and very frightening. A much better approach is to tackle this properly with a Fear of Flying course run by the airlines. We have listed a number of these below.

Easy Jet [Easyjet fearless flyer course](#)
British Airways [BA flying with confidence course](#)
[Virgin flying without fear course](#)

MISUSE OF MEDICATION

Benzodiazepines and Z drugs have the potential for misuse. They may result in dependence, where any risk factors are identified an appointment with a GP or pharmacist will be made before any further medication is prescribed.

LOST PRESCRIPTIONS WILL NOT BE REPLACED.

If you take higher doses than prescribed and run out of medication before the next prescription is due, you will NOT be prescribed extra tablets. A routine appointment to discuss this further with a clinician is advised.

These medicines are controlled drugs and will not be prescribed early.

PRESCRIPTIONS REQUESTED EARLY FOR TRAVEL WILL REQUIRE PROOF OF TRAVEL

DRIVING

This medication can cause drowsiness, dizziness and impaired cognitive function (thinking and judgement) it may affect your ability to drive safely.

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Please see the DVLA website for information on driving when taking prescription medicines such as benzodiazepines. [Drugs and driving: the law - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/drugs-and-driving-the-law)

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panic disorder pil

<https://www.choiceandmedication.org/leedsandyorkpft/generate/handychartpanicuk.pdf>

diazepam pil

<https://www.choiceandmedication.org/leedsandyorkpft/generate/pilldiazepamuk.pdf>

link to choice and medication sight for all leaflets

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References:

- (1) NICE Guidance on the use of zaleplon, zolpidem and zopiclone for the short-term management of insomnia. Online. Published 28th April 2004. Accessed 18/1/21. <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ta77/chapter/Appendix-B-Sources-of-evidence-considered-by-the-Committee>
- (2) NICE, back pain, diazepam, online, November 2020, accessed 21/2/21, <https://cks.nice.org.uk/topics/back-pain-low-without-radiculopathy/prescribing-information/diazepam/>
- (3) NICE, BNF, Diazepam phobic states, online, accessed 14/04/22 <https://bnf.nice.org.uk/drug/diazepam.html>

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