

Withdrawal from Benzodiazepines

The benzodiazepines include Diazepam (Valium), Lorazepam (Ativan), Alprazolam (Xanax), Clonazepam (Rivotril), Oxazepam (Serax) and Temazepam (Restoril).

You may experience SOME of the listed symptoms of withdrawal. Remember that ALL THESE SYMPTOMS ARE TEMPORARY. If any persist or worsen, have them checked by your doctor in case they are related to another problem.

See an explanation of some of the symptoms on page 3-4.

Unless it is not possible, you should stop the benzodiazepines gradually and under supervision to avoid the severe withdrawal symptoms listed below.

SEVERE WITHDRAWAL

These symptoms happen when you have used high doses for a long time and when you stop them suddenly.

The symptoms appear within two to ten days after your last dose and can last up to fourteen days, followed by the symptoms of mild to moderate withdrawal.

Physical Symptoms

- seizures (convulsions)
- insomnia
- headaches, generalized body ache
- hypersensitive to noise, light, smell, taste, touch
- chest pain, hyperventilation
- palpitations, rapid heart beat
- severe stomach pains, diarrhoea
- hand and body tremors
- flushing, sweating

Psychological Symptoms

- severe anxiety
- severe paranoia
- loss of touch with reality
- hallucinations
- rage, aggression, irritability

MILD TO MODERATE WITHDRAWAL

These symptoms happen when you have used prescribed or slightly more than prescribed doses for more than two weeks. The symptoms are more severe and last longer if you have used the benzodiazepines for six months or longer. They start 12 to 36 hours after your last dose. The symptoms gradually decrease after seven to fourteen days, but some of the symptoms can last up to a year. The symptoms are listed by frequency, with the first ones occurring more often.

Physical Symptoms

- insomnia
- stomach problems, especially abdominal pain and diarrhoea
- chest pain, hyperventilation
- flushing, sweating
- palpitations, rapid heart beat
- fatigue, exhaustion
- hypersensitive to noise, light, smell, taste, touch
- vision and hearing problems
- flu-like feeling
- headache, dizziness, light headedness
- muscle spasms, pain, weakness, stiffness
- stuffy nose, sinus congestion
- dry mouth, increased thirst, trouble swallowing
- itching
- numbness, tingling or burning skin sensations
- appetite and weight changes
- bladder and urination problems
- decreased sexual desire
- female hormone problems

Psychological Symptoms

- anxiety
- depression
- poor memory
- poor concentration
- drowsiness
- rage, aggression, irritability
- paranoia
- depersonalization

DESCRIPTION OF SYMPTOMS (alphabetical order)

Abnormal Bladder Function: uncontrolled loss of urine, having to urinate frequently, needing to urinate immediately once you are aware of the need to urinate, increased amount of urine each time you urinate, pain with urination.

Abnormal Function of Female Hormones: very heavy periods, increased premenstrual tension, breast swelling and breast pain.

Anxiety: feeling that an unreal or imagined danger is about to happen, feelings of powerlessness accompanied by increased heart rate, increased breathing, sweating, trembling, weakness. The anxiety can be part of phobias or panic attacks. Both excess caffeine and excess sugar can increase anxiety and insomnia.

Chest Pain: can be anywhere in your chest and is usually from tightening of the muscles in your chest wall.

Depersonalization: usual sense of reality is lost with a sense of personal unreality or distance from yourself. Sometimes you may experience a change in your body image or shape or feel that you don't control your own actions or speech.

Hallucinations: seeing, hearing, smelling or feeling things that are not real.

Hyperventilation: fast deep breaths, which can cause you to feel dizzy and light-headed.

Insomnia: especially early morning waking, but can be any form of disturbed sleep.

Muscle Pain, Weakness, Stiffness: the weakness can feel like "jelly legs"; the stiffness occurs mainly in the arms and legs, back and jaw muscles.

Muscle Spasms: uncontrolled movements of the muscles such as sudden movements of the large muscles of the arms or legs or small local muscle contractions such as eyelid muscle twitching; involuntary trembling or shaking.

Numbness, Tingling or Burning Sensations: the feeling you get when your hand falls asleep or you wake up with it asleep from lying on one arm too long. These sensations can occur anywhere on your body.

Palpitations: sensation of a rapid heartbeat or irregular heartbeat or as if your heart is "turning over".

Paranoia: thoughts or feelings of being disliked (or if intense, hated) by other people, that they are thinking or saying bad things about you; that you are about to be harmed by other people. When the paranoia worsens, you fully believe in the threat of harm and act as if you are about to be harmed.

Seizures: when benzodiazepine withdrawal seizures occur they usually occur before the other symptoms of severe withdrawal.

Stomach Problems: constipation, nausea and vomiting, heartburn, lower abdominal pain, muscle spasms in the stomach, diarrhoea.

Vision and Hearing Changes: blurred or double vision, sore eyes; hearing ringing or buzzing sounds.