

SEDATIVES FOR FLYING

WHAT IS THE FEAR OF FLYING?

Some people suffer from aerophobia or aviophobia - this is an extreme fear of flying in an aeroplane. People may fear different stages of the flight such as when the plane is taking off, landing or being on the air during the flight.

This is a very common disorder and affects approximately 33% of the population¹. This can be very limiting to the quality of life as well as negatively impact certain careers.

WHAT ARE SEDATIVE DRUGS?

People often come to the surgery requesting that we prescribe Diazepam or other similar sedative medication to help them to become more relaxed or sleep during the flight.

Benzodiazepine drugs such as Diazepam (Valium), Lorazepam, Temazepam, Alprazolam or Clonazepam have sedating properties and can be used to treat various other conditions such as alcohol withdrawal, anxiety and seizures.

This means that when used they can make you more sleepy or relaxed. This could pose a risk on rare occasion that there is an emergency on the flight as your reaction times could also be slowed. Therefore the use of sedatives for flying is no longer recommended.

WHY WE DON'T PRESCRIBE SEDATIVES FOR FLYING

The GP Partners here at Cirencester Health Group have made a decision **not to prescribe** diazepam or similar sedatives for flying anxiety for the following reasons;

1. They are not supported by the BNF (British National Formulary) which issues prescribing guidelines for doctors. The use of Diazepam or other sedatives is contraindicated (not allowed).²
2. If there is an emergency in the plane your reaction times may be slower and you may have reduced awareness if you have taken a sedative drug.
3. NICE guidelines do not recommend the use of medication to treat mild and self limiting mental health disorders.³
4. They may lead to an increased risk of developing blood clots (Deep vein thrombosis) as you will not be moving around as much during the flight when you are sleeping.
5. In some people Benzodiazepines can cause agitation and aggression. This could cause them to act in a disinhibited manner. In some people this can lead to them breaking the law or posing a risk to the flight which can lead to them being taken off the flight.
6. Benzodiazepines are controlled drugs and therefore illegal in some countries – they may be confiscated at the airport or lead to problems with the police in a foreign country.
7. All medical conditions and medications need to be declared when getting travel insurance. If not declared this could lead to the travel insurance becoming void.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP YOURSELF?

We do recognise that this is a very real and limiting condition.

We recommend attending a fear of flying course which many people have found beneficial.

Different airlines offer different courses to try and tackle the fear of flying:

- Easy Jet www.fearlessflyer.easyjet.com Tel 0203 8131644
- British Airways www.flyingwithconfidence.com Tel 01252 793250
- Virgin www.flyingwithoutfear.co.uk Tel 01423 714900

REFERENCES

1. <https://www.stratosjets.com/blog/fear-of-flying-statistics-trends-facts/>
2. British National Formulary; Diazepam <https://bnf.nice.org.uk/drugs/diazepam/>
3. Generalised anxiety disorder and panic disorder in adults: management. NICE Clinical guideline [CG113] Published date: January 2011 Last updated: June 2020 <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg113>