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## BENZODIAZEPINES: WHY WE DON'T ROUTINELY PRESCRIBE

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Benzodiazepines (such as diazepam, lorazepam and temazepam) are sedative medications that can help with anxiety, sleep problems, or acute distress. However, they carry serious risks and are not suitable for routine use.

We've created this leaflet to explain why we don't usually prescribe these medications – and to help you understand what works better.



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### The Risks of Benzodiazepines

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#### 1. They're addictive

Even short courses can lead to dependence. Some people find they struggle to stop or need higher doses to get the same effect.

#### 2. They stop working

For sleep or anxiety, benzodiazepines often lose their effectiveness after just a few days. Increasing the dose doesn't help – it only adds risk.

#### 3. They can make things worse long-term

People who rely on benzodiazepines often find their anxiety, sleep or mood problems return worse than before. These medicines are not a long-term solution.

#### 4. Side effects are common and serious

Benzodiazepines can cause a range of side effects, especially when used for more than a few days. These include:

- *Drowsiness, confusion, and poor memory*
- *Emotional 'numbness' or low mood*
- *Risk of falls or accidents*
- *Increased risk of dementia and overdose with long-term use*

*Older adults* are particularly vulnerable—these medicines can lead to confusion, falls, fractures and even hospital admissions, even at low doses.

They also become *dangerous when mixed* with alcohol or opioid painkillers (like codeine or morphine), increasing the *risk of serious harm or accidental death*.

## When Are They Used?

There are a few situations where benzodiazepines ***may be appropriate***:

- During ***alcohol withdrawal*** – prescribed by specialist drug and alcohol teams (not GPs)
- For ***certain seizures*** – with input from neurology
- Occasionally in ***hospital settings*** or severe acute distress

We **do not** prescribe benzodiazepines for:

- Anxiety or stress
- Trouble sleeping
- Exam nerves or public speaking
- Fear of flying
- Claustrophobia during scans (e.g. MRI)



## What If I Feel Panicky During a Scan?

Some people request sedatives like diazepam to manage claustrophobia or anxiety before a scan or minor hospital procedure. In general, we ***do not prescribe for this***.

Instead, we recommend:

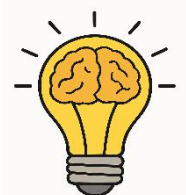
- ***CBT*** or ***hypnotherapy*** to reduce anxiety.
- Practical strategies like calming breathing techniques and guided imagery
- Booking with a scanner that offers music, mirrors or wide bore machines.

If sedation is still needed, it should be ***prescribed by the consultant or radiologist*** involved. They are responsible for assessing the risks and ensuring it is safe in the hospital setting.

## What Helps Instead?

We want to support you with approaches that are ***safe, modern and effective***:

- ***Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)*** – proven to work for anxiety, trauma and insomnia.
- ***Antidepressants*** – may be helpful if anxiety or sleep issues are persistent.
- ***Sleep hygiene advice*** – see our CHG ***Insomnia*** leaflet.
- ***Self-help tools*** – e.g. mindfulness, journalling, NHS and app-based programmes
- ***Understanding your options*** – see our CHG ***Depression*** and ***Fear of Flying*** leaflets.



There is no quick fix—but there is a way forward.

# Worried About Alcohol, Dependence, or Withdrawal?

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You can self-refer to the Gloucestershire Drug & Alcohol Service, provided by **VIA**:

**Website:** [www.viaorg.uk/services/gloucestershire-2/](http://www.viaorg.uk/services/gloucestershire-2/)

**Email:** [gloucestershire@viaorg.uk](mailto:gloucestershire@viaorg.uk)

**Phone:** 01452 223 014

## Main hubs:

- **Cheltenham:** Bramey House, Alstone Lane, GL51 8HE
- **Cinderford:** Belle Vue Centre, GL14 2AB
- **Gloucester:** Imperial Chambers, Longsmith Street, GL1 2HT
- **Stroud:** Bankfield House, GL5 3JQ

They provide 1:1 recovery support, prescribed detox if needed, and help with drug or alcohol dependence.



## We're Here to Support You

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If you're struggling with anxiety, poor sleep, or emotional distress, we take your concerns seriously, and we'll work with you to find lasting, safer solutions. We'll help you find a better, longer-lasting solution than a short-term fix. Speak to your usual GP or any member of our team.

## Useful Links and Resources

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- **CHG Insomnia leaflet**
- **CHG Depression leaflet**
- **CHG Fear of Flying leaflet**
- **NHS Every Mind Matters:** [www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters](http://www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters)
- **VIA Drug & Alcohol Service** (Gloucestershire): [www.viaorg.uk/services/gloucestershire-2/](http://www.viaorg.uk/services/gloucestershire-2/)
- **NHS Talking Therapies** service offers CBT for phobias. You can self-refer to this service:  
*Website:* [www.talk2gether.nhs.uk](http://www.talk2gether.nhs.uk); *Phone:* 0800073220

## References

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3. British Journal of General Practice (2019). "There is no role for benzodiazepines in the modern management of anxiety or insomnia." BJGP 69(680):152. [www.bjgp.org/content/69/680/152](http://www.bjgp.org/content/69/680/152)
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5. Royal College of General Practitioners. Top 10 tips: Managing dependence-forming medications. [www.elearning.rcgp.org.uk/pluginfile.php/149506/mod\\_page/content/2/Top%20Tips%20Managing%20Dependence%20Forming%20Medications.pdf](http://www.elearning.rcgp.org.uk/pluginfile.php/149506/mod_page/content/2/Top%20Tips%20Managing%20Dependence%20Forming%20Medications.pdf)
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7. Royal College of Radiologists. Sedation, analgesia and anaesthesia in the radiology department. (2018). [www.rcr.ac.uk/publication/sedation-analgesia-and-anaesthesia-radiology-department](http://www.rcr.ac.uk/publication/sedation-analgesia-and-anaesthesia-radiology-department)

### ***If you have further questions:***

- Use our **online triage form** via the **practice website**: [www.cirencesterhealthgroup.co.uk](http://www.cirencesterhealthgroup.co.uk)
- Call the **practice** on 01285 653184 or 01285 653122
- If you require **urgent** medical advice, call 111 (24 Hrs)
- In an **emergency** call **999**

