# Attachment 2: Reducing and stopping benzodiazepines and Z-drugs1,2

# The PrescQIPP dependence forming medicines resources contain a deprescribing benzodiazepine and Z-drug algorithm available at <https://www.prescqipp.info/our-resources/bulletins/bulletin-256-dependence-forming-medications/>

* Decide if the person can stop their current benzodiazepine or Z-drug without changing to diazepam.
* Switching to diazepam is recommended for:
* People using the short-acting potent benzodiazepines (e.g. lorazepam).
* People using preparations that do not easily allow for small reductions in dose (that is alprazolam, flurazepam, loprazolam and lormetazepam).
* People taking temazepam or nitrazepam who choose to withdraw from diazepam after discussing the advantages and disadvantages.
* People experiencing difficulty or who are likely to experience difficulty withdrawing directly from temazepam, nitrazepam, or Z-drugs, due to a high degree of dependency (associated with long duration of treatment, high doses and a history of anxiety problems).
* Seek specialist advice (preferably from a hepatic specialist) before switching to diazepam in people with hepatic dysfunction as diazepam may accumulate to a toxic level in these individuals. An alternative benzodiazepine without active metabolites (such as oxazepam) may be preferred.
* Concomitant renal or hepatic impairment should be taken into consideration when prescribing all benzodiazepines.3
* Diazepam is available as 2mg tablets which could be halved to give 1mg doses to allow the dose to be reduced in stages of 1mg every 1 – 4 weeks or more. It is difficult to obtain such low doses of other benzodiazepines. However, the manufacturer has no safety or efficacy data to support the use of halved diazepam 2mg tablets, therefore this would be an off-licence use of the product.3
* Negotiate a gradual drug withdrawal schedule (dose tapering) that is flexible. Be guided by the person in making adjustments so that they remain comfortable with the withdrawal.
* Titrate the drug withdrawal according to the severity of withdrawal symptoms, e.g. withdrawal should be gradual (dose tapering, such as 5–10% reduction every 1–2 weeks, or an eighth of the dose fortnightly, with a slower reduction at lower doses), and titrated according to the severity of withdrawal symptoms. See withdrawal regimes below. Drug withdrawal may take three months to a year or longer. Some people may be able to withdraw in less time.
* Review frequently, to detect and manage problems early and to provide advice and encouragement during and after the drug withdrawal.
* If they did not succeed on their first attempt, encourage the person to try again.
* Remind the person that reducing benzodiazepine dosage, even if this falls short of complete drug withdrawal, can still be beneficial.
* If another attempt is considered, reassess the person first, and treat any underlying problems (such as depression) before trying again. If they did not succeed on their first attempt, encourage the person to try again.
* The Specialist Pharmacy Services provide a table of approximate equivalents of benzodiazepines. There is however inter-patient variability, differing half-lives and differing sedative properties and information should be interpreted using clinical and pharmaceutical knowledge and applied cautiously with doses titrated against patient response.3

**Table 2: Equivalent doses of benzodiazepines3**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Drug** | **Ashton Manual** | **BNF** | **Maudsley Guidelines** | **Psychotropic Drug Directory** | **UK Guidelines** |
| Diazepam | 5mg | 5mg | 5mg | 5mg | 5mg |
| Alprazolam | 250  micrograms | 250 micrograms |  | 500 micrograms  (250 – 500 micrograms) | 250 micrograms |
| Chlordiazepoxide | 12.5mg | 12.5mg | 12.5mg | 12.5mg (10 – 25mg) | 12.5 – 15mg |
| Clobazam | 10mg | 10mg |  | 10mg | 10mg |
| Clonazepam  (wide reported equivalence) | 250  micrograms | 250 micrograms | 0.5 – 1mg | 250 micrograms (0.25 – 4mg) | 250 micrograms |
| Flurazepam | 7.5 – 15mg | 7.5 – 15mg |  | 7.5 – 15mg | 7.5 – 15mg |
| Loprazolam | 0.5 – 1mg | 0.5 – 1mg |  | 0.5 – 1mg | 0.5 – 1mg |
| Lorazepam | 500  micrograms | 500 micrograms | 500 micrograms | 500  micrograms | 500 micrograms |
| Lormetazepam | 0.5 – 1mg | 0.5 – 1mg | 500 micrograms | 0.5 – 1mg | 0.5 – 1mg |
| Nitrazepam | 5mg | 5mg | 5mg | 5mg (2.5 – 20mg) | 5mg |
| Oxazepam | 10mg | 10mg | 15mg | 10mg (10 – 20mg) | 10 – 15mg |
| Temazepam | 10mg | 10mg | 10mg | 10mg | 10mg |

Withdrawal regimens can be found at:

* All Wales Medicines Strategy Group. Education Pack. Material to support appropriate prescribing of hypnotics and anxiolytics across Wales. April 2011. Available at <http://www.wales.nhs.uk/sites3/Documents/582/Guide_Hypnotics%20%26%20Anxiolytics%20Practice%20Guide_version02.pdf> Accessed 20/06/09.
* Ashton CH. Slow withdrawal schedules. The Ashton Manual, University of Newcastle, 2002. Available at [www.benzo.org.uk/manual/bzsched.htm](http://www.benzo.org.uk/manual/bzsched.htm) Accessed 20/06/19
* NHS Clinical Knowledge Summary. Benzodiazepine and Z-drug withdrawal. Available at <http://cks.nice.org.uk/benzodiazepine-and-z-drug-withdrawal#!scenario> Accessed 20/06/09.

## Further resources for patients

Benzodiazepines - [www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mentalhealthinfo/treatments/benzodiazepines.aspx](http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mentalhealthinfo/treatments/benzodiazepines.aspx)

Stopping benzodiazepines and Z-drugs -

<http://patient.info/health/stopping-benzodiazepines-and-z-drugs>

Battle against tranquillisers - <http://bataid.org>

PrescQIPP. 258. Hypnotics - Attachment 10 - Self-care resources for insomnia and anxiety - [www.prescqipp.info](http://www.prescqipp.info)

**References**

1. Ashton CH. Benzodiazepines: what they do in the body. The Ashton Manual University of Newcastle, 2002. Available at [https://benzo.org.uk/manual/bzsched.htm Accessed 20/06/19](https://benzo.org.uk/manual/bzsched.htm%20Accessed%2020/06/19).
2. Clinical Knowledge Summary. Benzodiazepine and Z-drug withdrawal. Last revised January 2019. Available at <https://cks.nice.org.uk/benzodiazepine-and-z-drug-withdrawal> Accessed on 20/6/19
3. Specialist Pharmacy Services. Medicines Q&A. What are the equivalent doses of oral benzodiazepines? Published July 2014, updated November 2018. Available at <https://www.sps.nhs.uk/articles/what-are-the-equivalent-doses-of-oral-benzodiazepines/> Accessed 24/11/19.