**Patient information leaflet - Sleeping tablets (Benzodiazepines and Z-drugs)**

This advice is for people who are prescribed benzodiazepines and Z-drugs.

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| Examples of benzodiazapines | Temazepam  Loprazolam  Lormetazepam  Nitrazepam |
| Examples of Z-drugs | Zolpidem  Zopiclone |

**Why are doctors reluctant to prescribe sleeping tablets?**

Sleeping tablets may cause significant problems, which include:

* **Drowsiness and clumsiness**People taking sleeping tablets are known to have more accidents (e.g. falls and car-related incidents), therefore it may not be safe to drive or operate machinery. Older people taking sleeping tablets have an increased risk of falling and sustaining bone fractures (e.g. hip injury).
* **Mood and mental changes**Some people can become aggressive, confused, forgetful or depressed. In older people, there may also be a link to dementia.
* **Dependence and tolerance**  
  Your body may quickly get used to the effect of sleeping tablets so they may stop helping if you keep taking them. Some people may become addicted to sleeping tablets (i.e. dependence problems), and this means that they may experience withdrawal symptoms if the drug is stopped suddenly. Typical withdrawal symptoms include anxiety, panic attacks, sweating, headaches and shaking. Other symptoms may include the inability to sleep, sickness or being oversensitive to light and sound.

**What is the alternative to sleeping tablets?**

Your doctor, nurse or pharmacist can advise you on how to tackle poor sleep without drug intervention. Advice includes:

* Establishing fixed times for going to bed and waking up.
* Creating a relaxing bedtime routine.
* Only going to bed when you feel tired.
* Maintaining a comfortable sleeping environment that's not too hot, cold, noisy or bright.
* Not napping during the day.
* Avoiding caffeine, nicotine and alcohol in the evenings or late at night.
* Avoiding eating a heavy meal or exercising vigorously late at night.

**Further information about sleep**

Good sleep hygiene: <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Insomnia/Pages/Prevention.aspx>

Sleeping well leaflet: [www.rcpsych.ac.uk/healthadvice/problemsdisorders/sleepingwell.aspx](http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/healthadvice/problemsdisorders/sleepingwell.aspx)

**Advice if a sleeping tablet is prescribed**

Sleeping tablet prescriptions will usually only last for a short amount of time (a week or so). Please do not ask for more, or for it to be added to your repeat prescription.

* **If you feel drowsy the next day, do not drive or operate machinery.**The DVLA is responsible for deciding if a person is medically unfit to drive. It is the responsibility of the licence holder to inform the DVLA of any medical condition or tablets that may affect safe driving - see [www.gov.uk/drug-driving-law](http://www.gov.uk/drug-driving-law)
* **Avoid alcohol.**
* **Never give your sleeping tablets to anyone and always keep them in a safe place (locked cupboard).**

**What if you have been taking sleeping tablets regularly for some time?**

* As a rule, you should consider reducing or stopping taking sleeping pills with advice from your doctor.
* Do it gradually; cut down the dose a little at a time.
* Pick a good time to do it; it is best to wait until your stress levels are as low as possible. Consider stopping the tablets whilst on holiday or when you have less pressure from work or family pressures etc.
* Remember to anticipate and accept that you are likely to have worse sleep when undertaking a tablet reduction regime. This is normal and will pass. However, most people who reduce or stop sleeping tablets say they feel much better mentally and physically. There are leaflets available from your practice or pharmacy to help you with coping strategies, and tips on how to naturally improve your sleep pattern.
* Use the “good sleep guide”  
  Copies are available from your GP practice and include helpful advice on how to get a good night’s sleep. Good sleep patterns can take weeks to establish, but be confident and you will get there in the end!
* Look for possible causes of sleep interference such as pain, indigestion, breathlessness or itching. They can often be treated without sleeping tablets.
* Check with your doctor or pharmacist whether any other medicines you are taking are likely to cause sleep problems.

**IMPORTANT.** Do not stop your sleeping tablet medication suddenly, as this may cause problems. You should discuss your case in detail with your doctor first.

**Further information**

Benzodiazepines: [www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mentalhealthinfo/treatments/benzodiazepines.aspx](file:///C:\PrescQIPP\PQ%20work%202016\Hypnotics\QA%20docs\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>