

Hypnotics & anxiolytics: A brief guide

Medications can have serve as hypnotic (i.e., to facilitate sleep), and/or anxiolytic (i.e., to dissipate anxiety) agents. Those used for the latter purpose of dissipating anxiety tend to work quickly and are prescribed for short-term usage.

Benzodiazepines

These medications tend to work as both hypnotic and anxiolytic agents. Examples include:

- Diazepam (Valium)
- Lorazepam (Ativan)
- Alprazolam (Xanax)
- Clonazepam (Klonopin)

When used over the long-term (months to years), these medications can induce tolerance and dependence. This means that increasing doses are required to produce the same effect as before, and the body feels as though it cannot do without the medication. These might make it difficult for an individual to stop the medication.

Other Medications

- Z-Hypnotics/Z-Drugs: Zopiclone (Imovane), Zolpidem (Stilnox)

As the name suggests, Z-Hypnotics are primarily used as hypnotic agents. Like benzodiazepines, these medications can induce tolerance and dependence with prolonged use.

- Antihistamines: Hydroxyzine (Atarax), Chlorphenamine (Piriton)

Antihistamines tend not to induce tolerance and dependence. They may however promote appetite increase and weight gain.

- Naturally-occurring hormone: Melatonin

All the medications on this page cause drowsiness, with side effects that can include:

- Hangover effect of sedation on the next day (should not be a problem with Melatonin)
- Impairment of concentration and reaction times
- Impairment of some memory functions
- Muscle weakness and/or incoordination
- Blurred vision
- Dizziness
- Nausea, vomiting or diarrhea

Precaution

As all these medications cause sedation, care should be taken when driving or operating machinery, as reaction times can be slowed.

Falls are a serious concern when on such medications, particularly in the elderly.

Concurrent use of alcohol and/or traditional Chinese medications with the medications listed above can lead to erratic absorption, which would make their effects difficult to predict.

The information provided serves as psycho-education and not a guide for self-medication. The information contained herein is not intended to cover all possible uses, directions, precautions, warnings, drug interactions, allergic reactions, or adverse effects. Please consult your psychiatrist before taking any medication.



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