

Benzodiazepine use and risk of Alzheimer's disease

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A new study was published in September 2014 that appears to confirm a link between taking certain anxiety and sleep medications and the development of Alzheimer's disease.

"Benzodiazepine use is associated with an increased risk of Alzheimer's disease. The stronger association observed for long term exposures reinforces the suspicion of a possible direct association, even if benzodiazepine use might also be an early marker of a condition associated with an increased risk of dementia. Long term use of these drugs should be considered as a public health concern.

Results show that past use of benzodiazepines for three months or more was associated with an increased risk (up to 51%) of Alzheimer's disease. The strength of association increased with longer exposure and with use of long-acting benzodiazepines rather than short-acting ones.

Benzodiazepines are "indisputably valuable tools for managing anxiety disorders and transient insomnia" they write, but warn that ***treatments 'should be of short duration and not exceed three months.'***

But what if I take it occasionally—just once or twice a week?

In this study, whether the individuals took 180 daily doses in a row or spread them out over years, their risk of later developing Alzheimer's disease was nearly double that of people who had never taken the drugs or who stopped at 90 doses.

----And many people don't stop at 90, or stop at all. "The problem is chronic use," Dr. Pariente said. "You develop a tolerance and a dependency."

So what do I do now?

Depending on the length of use and the dose, these medications usually need to be discontinued very slowly—in some cases over a period of several months. Some patients may require inpatient detox.

Benzodiazepines are highly addictive, so withdrawal symptoms are more likely to occur in individuals who have taken them for more than just a few weeks.

Research done over decades continues to demonstrate that the most effective, long-lasting treatment for anxiety and panic is cognitive-behavioral therapy with a qualified therapist—more effective than medication. There are also other non-addicting medications and supplements that can be used. In addition, we now know that there are effective ways to delay or even prevent the development of dementia.

BENZODIAZEPINES

alprazolam	Xanax
clonazepam	Klonopin
chlordiazepoxide	Librium
diazepam	Valium
eszopiclone	Lunesta
lorazepam	Ativan
oxazepam	Serax
temazepam	Restoril
zolpidem	Ambien
zaleplon	Sonata

Journal References:

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Ducruet, T. Kurth, H. Verdoux, M. Tournier, A. Pariente, B. Begaud. Benzodiazepine use and risk of Alzheimer's disease: case-control study.

K. Yaffe, M. Boustani. Benzodiazepines and risk of Alzheimer's disease. BMJ, 2014; 349 (sep09 6): g5312 DOI: 10.1136/bmj.g5312

Natural remedies for anxiety that are backed by research:

Passion Flower (*passiflora*). In the clinical studies, passion flower was found to be as effective as prescription anti-anxiety medications alprazolam (Xanax), lorazepam (Ativan) and clonazepam (Klonopin) that are known to increase the risk of Alzheimer's; a risk that is not present with passion flower.

Dose: fresh tincture (1:2), 2-4 milliliters three times daily.
or tea 1-2 tsp. dried herb, 8 oz. hot water, steep 45 minutes, take 1-2 cups per day
a daily dose of 4 to 8 grams is typical.

Ginkgo biloba. In the clinical studies, ginkgo was found to be as effective as prescription anti-anxiety medications that are known to increase the risk of Alzheimer's..
One substantial, well-designed double-blind, placebo-controlled study found evidence that ginkgo extract taken at a dose of 240 mg. or 480 mg. daily may be helpful for anxiety.

Chamomile (*matricaria recutita*). In the clinical studies, chamomile was found to be as effective as prescription anti-anxiety medications that are known to increase the risk of Alzheimer's. Dose: 220 mg. capsules, one to five capsules daily or 1-4 cups of tea daily.

L-theanine 200-400 mg. up to three times daily as needed for anxiety. L-theanine 400 mg. is also beneficial for sleep and some people use it in combination with melatonin.

Magnesium glycinate 200 mg twice a day, increasing to 400 mg. twice a day if needed.

National Institutes of Health, National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine. <http://nccam.nih.gov/>

Suggested Lifestyle Changes

- Breathing exercises are one of the best single anti-anxiety measures. Many people experiencing anxiety tend to hold their breath or hyperventilate without being conscious of their actions. Controlling breathing and breath work can offer an immediate lessening of anxiety and a sense of empowerment.
- Meditation and relaxation can help lessen the effect of anxiety by training one to focus on the present moment, thus keeping minds off fears. Meditating on a regular basis can result in significant, long-term reduction of anxiety.
- Eliminating all sources of caffeine and stimulants from the diet can markedly reduce symptoms, and is especially helpful in those who are stimulant-sensitive.
- Cognitive behavioral therapy can help those with anxiety to recognize distorted patterns of thinking and adopt healthy coping skills. Research has consistently proven that cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is more effective than medications. We also know that over the long-term, CBT produces lasting results, which is not true for medications such as alprazolam (Xanax), lorazepam (Ativan), clonazepam (Klonopin), diazepam (Valium) and other medications in that category.
- Journaling anxious thoughts, worries and symptoms can help reduce stress, identify unfounded fears and monitor progress.
- Regular daily exercise is another excellent way to combat anxiety. Exercises such as brisk walking and moderate strength training can reduce stress and anxiety, and offer a healthy distraction from negative thoughts. Even 20-30 minutes of walking per day has been found to improve memory as well as depression and anxiety.
- Taking a "media break" (by eliminating TV news bulletins, the internet newspapers and new magazines) can help anyone with anxiety. A week without "negative" news can teach someone they have choices in how much information they are exposed to, as well as how they process news.

<http://www.drweil.com/drw/u/ART00695/generalized-anxiety-disorder.html>