

## WHAT ARE BENZODIAZEPINES?

Benzodiazepines are central nervous system depressants, which means they slow down the workings of the brain. When prescribed by a medical professional, they are intended to treat stress, anxiety, and sleeping disorders. When abused recreationally, users commonly report feelings of euphoria (a “high”), or when the drug is combined with stimulant type drugs (cocaine, amphetamines, ecstasy) it is used as an aid to ‘come down’.

Irrespective of the use type (legal or illegal) Benzodiazepines are highly addictive.

## HOW BENZODIAZEPINES ARE USED AND HOW TO IDENTIFY THEM?

Benzodiazepines are commonly taken orally and intravenously, though they can be smoked, or administered rectally, intranasally, or intramuscularly. As the drug is both legally and illegally attainable, how it presents is also variable:



It may be packaged in pill bottles or blister strips if sourced legally, and small plastic sachets, balloons, or household aluminium foil if sourced illegally.



As there is a wide range of generic and brand formulations of the drug available on the market, the type (capsule or tablet), colour, shape, and size of the pills is equally diverse. This is also true when the drug is in powder and liquid form.

## COMMON STREET NAMES

Xannies, Bars, Xanbars, Planks, Bricks, Upjohn, School Bus, K, K-pin, Super Valium, Pin, Benzos, Downers, Nerve Pills, Tranks, V's, Yellow V's, Blue V's, Downers, Tranks, Sleep Aways, Howards, Old Joes

## BUSINESS RISKS

Whilst under the influence of Cocaine, many of the symptoms associated with the drugs consumption are likely to cause hazardous behaviours in the user. These actions may not only affect the user personally, but also; the safety of co-workers, a greater risk of damage to plant and equipment, and in the event of an accident, ongoing commercial impacts such as increased insurance premiums, costs associated with injury management, and the potential for costly legal action.

## ABOUT APAC DIAGNOSTIC

APAC Diagnostic sponsors the No Drugs at Work campaign and also offers fully customisable drug testing solutions for your workplace. Please contact our team on +61 2 9986 2252 or via email and we will be pleased to help you in working to create a safe and drug free workplace.

## AVAILABILITY

Benzodiazepines are most commonly prescribed to patients by physicians or other licensed medical practitioners for legitimate health concerns. An unfortunate side effect of this is that some of these prescriptions make their way onto the illicit drug market.

Benzodiazepines may also be illegally produced either domestically (Grey Market variants) or overseas. Imported versions of the drug can be liquid or powdered benzodiazepines that have been, cut, and then reformed in a pill press. Grey market variants have very similar effects on the body after ingestion, however they regularly have quite different chemical compositions to the brand or generic formulations

In 2020, the main approach for arranging the purchase of any illicit or non-prescribed drugs by participants of the Drugs Reporting System (EDRS) in the previous 12 months was via social networking applications (such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Snapchat, Grindr, Tinder) (75%), followed by face-to-face (67%).

## QUICK FACTS ABOUT USAGE

- Benzodiazepines are nervous system depressants commonly prescribed to treat medical conditions such as anxiety, stress, insomnia, epilepsy, and as a sedative prior to a medical procedure, but are also abused non-medically in isolation, and together with other drugs or substances to amplify or counteract the effects of other drugs or substances.
- In Australia, pharmaceuticals that are most often subject to non-medical use are opioids (painkillers/analgesics) and sedatives (sleeping/anti-anxiety medications). Within the “sedatives” category, Benzodiazepines comprise the largest group of drugs in this class. Between 2009 and 2018, the number of deaths where benzodiazepines were present rose by 70%.
- As per the 2019 NDSHS, the proportion of people who recently used pharmaceuticals for non-medical purposes was similar for those living in Major cities (4.3%) and Remote and very remote areas (4.8%)
- Benzodiazepines are consistently ranked in the top two drugs present in drug induced deaths for both sexes, and also for both sexes in the age range of 25-55. This statistic indicates that drug abuse can affect employees from any given industry, and at all levels of an organisation.

## SYMPTOMS OF WITHDRAWAL

The most commonly observed symptoms of Benzodiazepine withdrawal are:

- anxiousness
- difficulty sleeping and tiredness
- feelings of sensory overload (noise, light, smell, and touch)
- muscle spasms, shaking, and skeletal pain
- headache, dizziness, or migraines
- feelings of hopelessness and generally depressive state
- difficulty concentrating, and memory loss
- loss of appetite, and nausea
- seizures and convulsions may occur where usage has suddenly and completely stopped

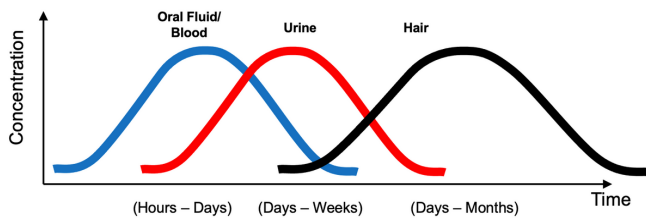
## SIGNS OF USE

- Reduced alertness
- Lack of coordination
- Slower reaction times
- Lower inhibitions
- Impulsive behaviour and risk taking (2)
- Severe mood swings and aggression
- Nausea
- Difficulty sleeping and tiredness
- Inability to think critically
- Memory lapses

## DETECTION WINDOW

A Drug Detection Window is the period of time after a drug's ingestion by a user during which a drug or its metabolites remain present in the user's system and can be detected through various drug testing protocols. For Benzodiazepines, the periods of time are:

- Urine: Up to 11 days
- Saliva: Up to 3 days
- Hair: Up to 90 days
- Sweat: Up to 7 days
- Blood: Up to 24 hours



## SIGNS OF OVERDOSE

- Blurred or double vision, or temporary loss of sight
- Feelings of sadness, confusion, or hopelessness
- Sleepiness, dizziness, and an inability to move co-ordinately
- A low body temperature indicated by blueing of the lips and fingernails
- Difficulty breathing escalating to the cessation of breathing altogether
- An abnormally high heart rate
- Difficulty speaking or slurring of speech
- Nausea
- Trembling or shaking

## WHAT TO DO IN THE EVENT OF AN OVERDOSE

If someone looks like they are in trouble and there is a suspicion that they may have been using drugs, it's very important that they get medical help quickly. A quick response can save their life.

- Call an ambulance by dialling triple zero (000). Ambulance officers are not required to involve the police unless they feel in danger.
- Stay with the person until the ambulance arrives. Find out if anyone at the scene knows CPR in case the person stops breathing.
- Ensure the person has enough air by keeping crowds back and opening windows or taking them outside. Loosen tight clothing.
- If the person is unconscious or wants to lie down, put them in the recovery position. This involves gently rolling them onto their side and slightly tilting their head back. This stops them choking if they vomit and allows them to breathe easily.
- Provide ambulance officers with as much information as you can, such as how much of the drug was used, how long ago and any pre-existing medical conditions. If they have taken a drug that came in a packet, give the packet to the ambulance officers.
- If you can't get a response from someone, don't assume they're asleep. Not all overdoses happen quickly and sometimes it can take hours for someone to die. Doing something early could save a life.
- Update your Incident and/or Injury Register with all required details(12)

## DEVELOPING A WORKPLACE ALCOHOL AND DRUG POLICY

Alcohol and drugs—including medicines prescribed by a doctor or available from a pharmacy—can affect a person's ability to work safely. For help developing a policy for your workplace, please visit: [www.apacsecutry.com.au/workplacepolicy](http://www.apacsecutry.com.au/workplacepolicy).