

Benzodiazepines

Information for Patients Who Lose Access to Care

OVERVIEW

Benzodiazepines are a class of medications that slow the central nervous system. They are commonly used to treat conditions such as generalized anxiety disorder, psychological distress, sleep disorder, or social phobias.¹

Common benzodiazepines are diazepam (Valium), lorazepam (Ativan), alprazolam (Xanax), and clonazepam (Klonopin).

RISKS OF SUDDEN DISCONTINUATION

When a patient who has been treated with benzodiazepines suddenly stops taking their medication or takes less than they normally do, the patient may experience **withdrawal symptoms**.

Sudden discontinuation of benzodiazepines may lead to rapid and potentially life-threatening symptoms of withdrawal including:²

- Sleep disturbance, irritability, or psychosis
- Anxiety, panic attacks, or thoughts or attempts of suicide
- Tremor, difficulty concentrating, or nausea
- Heart palpitations or muscular pain and stiffness
- Seizure

Patients who lose access to their provider are encouraged to re-establish care as soon as possible. Visit bit.ly/patientadvocacyPA for tips on how to re-establish care.

In the case of a medical emergency, call 911 or go to a local Emergency Room immediately.

¹ [Benzodiazepine Drug Information | FDA](#)

² [The benzodiazepine withdrawal syndrome - PubMed \(nih.gov\)](#)

³ [Fentanyl Facts - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)

⁴ [Naloxone Drug Facts | National Institute on Drug Abuse \(NIDA\) \(nih.gov\)](#)

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DANGERS OF COUNTERFEIT BENZODIAZEPINES

When a patient suddenly loses access to their provider, they may feel they have no other option but to turn to other sources to avoid withdrawal. There are serious risks associated with taking benzodiazepines from illicit sources that do not require a prescription. These sources may provide counterfeit (fake) pills.

Unknown to a consumer, fake pills may contain illicit ingredients such as fentanyl. Fentanyl is a powerful synthetic opioid that is like morphine but is 50 to 100 times more potent.³ Fentanyl is a major contributor to overdose.³

RESOURCES

- Detoxification, or detox programs help patients safely manage the withdrawal process. To access these services, patients will first complete an assessment to determine the appropriate level of care. To access these services, you can do one or more of the following:
 - Call the number on the back of your health insurance card
 - Visit [treatmentatlas.org](https://www.treatmentatlas.org): ATLAS is an online search tool for patients who may need withdrawal management services or substance use disorder treatment.
 - Call the **Pennsylvania Get Help Now Helpline** (available 24/7): **1-800-662-HELP (4357)**
- Naloxone is an easy-to-use, life-saving medication that reverses an opioid overdose by blocking the effects of opioids such as fentanyl, which could be present in fake pills. While naloxone cannot reverse the effects of a benzodiazepine, a person who takes medications provided by someone other than their health care provider risks experiencing an opioid overdose and should obtain naloxone.⁴
 - The Standing Order for naloxone allows anyone to get naloxone without a prescription from their local pharmacy, visit pa.gov/opioids for more information.
 - Naloxone is available for free through the mail, visit: nextdistro.org.
- Various mental health hotlines, search tools, and resources are available in Pennsylvania, visit: bit.ly/PAFindHelp.
- The **National Suicide Crisis Lifeline** provides 24/7 free and private support to anyone. **Call by dialing 988 or text "HOME" to 741741** or visit 988lifeline.org.
- The Patient Advocacy Program: a resource coordinator for patients prescribed controlled substance medications who lose access to care. Call **844-377-7367** (Monday-Friday, 8:00 AM – 4:00 PM) or email ra-dh-advocacy@pa.gov.