

# Outpatient Benzodiazepine Tapering In Primary Care

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# Objective

- Discuss safe approaches to tapering patients from benzodiazepines in the primary care ambulatory care setting.

# Background

- Evidence has shown that long-term use of benzodiazepines has limited benefits and many risks.
- Unfortunately, an increasing amount of patients chronically remain on these agents - often times in combination with other potentially dangerous drugs.
- Inappropriate benzodiazepine tapering, or abrupt discontinuation, can lead to increased risk of serious withdrawal symptoms, including seizures or death.

*Am Fam Physician.* 2013; 88(4):224-225

*Am J Public Health.* 2016; 106(4):686-688



# Organizing the Taper

- Slow taper is recommended
  - Length of taper varies based on length of therapy

Week of Taper	Change in Dose
Weeks 1-2	10%-25% reduction
Weeks 3+	10% reduction
When 20% of dosage remains	5% reduction

- If withdrawal symptoms or condition worsens:
  - Consider maintaining current dose for 1-2 weeks longer, then continue
  - Consider continuing taper at a slower rate



# Example Taper

Week	Tapering Schedule							
	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun	
1 and 2	●	◐	●	◐	●	◐	◐	✓
3 and 4	◐	◐	●	◐	●	◐	◐	✓
5 and 6	◐	◐	◐	◐	◐	◐	◐	
7 and 8	◑	◐	◐	◐	◐	◐	◐	

Adapted from: Tannenbaum et al. "You May Be at Risk". 2014.



# Monitoring

- Screening
  - PHQ-9/GAD-7 and Drug Abuse Screening Tool (DAST) screenings
- Adherence to tapering program
  - Checking state's prescription drug monitoring programs
- Safe benzodiazepine alternatives
- Patient counseling and education
- Close follow-up appointments scheduled



# Key Takeaways

## 1) KEY TAKEAWAY #1

*Slow benzodiazepine tapering is important to prevent harmful adverse events.*

## 2) KEY TAKEAWAY #2

*Additional monitoring needs considered in each patient to address underlying conditions and ensure a successful taper.*

## 3) KEY TAKEAWAY #3

*Creating a “roadmap” for the patient to take home allows for ease of self-tapering between provider appointments.*



# Self-Assessment Question

On average, how often should a patient's weekly benzodiazepine dose be decreased during chronic tapering?

- a) Every 3-5 days
- b) Every 1-2 weeks
- c) Monthly
- d) Every 3 months

Answer: B

