

Benzodiazepines

The Dangers of Benzodiazepines

If you are one or more benzodiazepines (Klonopin, Valium, Librium, Xanax, Ativan, Restoril, etc.) thinking of taking one, or know someone taking one, please read the following. I have had ST since 2001 and thanks to the ST Recovery Clinic, I have recovered extremely well. However, early in my first year with ST when I was in severe pain and disfigurement, I was put on Klonopin for relief, which I am still on to this day. It is beyond me why my doctors so nonchalantly kept me on Klonopin for over 6 years (particularly in light of my continuous reduction in ST symptoms), and it never would have happened had I known the extreme dangers of this drug that I have recently learned about and feel compelled to share. I have to admit that it was also my fault for staying on it for so long, but it had become a way of life that I thought nothing of it and I was never given any indication that long term use would be harmful. While it may appear throughout this article that I am completely condemning benzos, I want to make it clear that I believe that these meds can do wonderful things for us, but to be very cautious regarding long term use.

Over the past 8-10 months, I have been experiencing symptoms unlike anything I have ever before: This is just a partial list and the severity varies throughout the day:

- My body feels like it is swaying back and forth. Like I am stuck in cement and my body is heaving
- Feels like I am on a boat bobbing up and down in the ocean
- Each step feels like I am balancing my foot and body on an unstable surface- with each step, my leg (and whole body) feels like it is wobbling as if balancing on a slippery surface like ice.
- The floor looks like it is moving and feels like it is soft and I am sinking into it. I have to often stand on tip toes to take some of this feeling away.
- My head often feel like it is not attached to my body. Feels like it is floating or being pulled off.
- My skin feels like it is dripping off my bones and I am turning invisible
- Severe muscle weakness as if my arms and legs are the weight of telephone poles.
- Vertigo and tinnitus
- Any visual or auditory stimuli makes all of these symptoms worse
- Anxiety and depersonalization, all of which I never experienced prior to going on Klonopin

Rather than go into the details of what benzodiazepines do to the body from a scientific perspective, and discuss all of the side effects, withdrawal and how to taper off them, I urge anyone on benzos or thinking of going on them to consult this website: <http://www.benzo.org.uk/manual/index.htm>. It is an online manual written by one of the world's experts on benzos called BENZODIAZEPINES: HOW THEY WORK AND HOW TO WITHDRAW. It is the most comprehensive information I have yet to find on the subject and it has helped me tremendously There is also a fantastic benzodiazepine support group online at www.benzowithdrawal.com.

It is unfortunate how little we who take them know about benzodiazepines. Even more unfortunate and amazing is how little our doctor pill pushers understand the true nature of these dangerous meds. The more I learn the more astonished I am at how many lives have been affected. Almost every single person I know who has taken them for any length of time has been negatively affected by these meds to varying degrees, not to mention those around them. While many suffer uncomfortable side effects from these drugs, the interesting thing is that it is often not the side effects of the medication that are the biggest problem. Rather, because of their addictive quality and the body's tolerance to them, the biggest issue is typically withdrawal. Some have compared the potency of benzodiazepines to heroine.

Withdrawal does not only affect those who are weaning off these drugs, but those who are taking their prescribed dose. The reason for this is because the body builds up a tolerance and over time, needs more to maintain equilibrium. When more of the drug is not taken, bizarre physical symptoms often occur. This is exactly what happened with me. I was taking the prescribed dose and was already in withdrawal without knowing it. So, by incorrectly thinking my symptoms might be **caused** by my meds, I started to wean off them, when in fact I was already in withdrawal and should have upped my dose to a comfortable level and then begin tapering slowly under proper supervision.

As a result, I spent a year trying to get off my meds on my own thinking they were causing my symptoms, but I was instead going through severe withdrawal and only making things worse by continuing a rapid, unsafe taper. I now have to up dose and start all over again. I shot myself in the foot not knowing the gun was loaded, so to speak, but that is how we learn so I have to look at it as a good thing. I say it is a good thing because had I not seen numerous specialists and gotten extensive testing, and spent thousands of dollars looking for answers, not to mention my frustration with each doctor being unable to help or even give me a glimmer of an idea as to what was wrong, I never would have continued my search and narrowed things down to determine what the real problem was. It really wasn't until a good friend faxed me an article on benzos that it finally confirmed what was wrong and I was able to move in a direction that provided me with answers.

This was just like what I went through before I figured out I had ST. After many months and many doctors who could not figure out what was wrong with me, I diagnosed myself, not unlike many STR's have to do. I have to say that it is getting rather tiresome shelling out thousands of dollars to doctors who should be doing this for me. They have hurt me in more ways than they have helped. With this in mind, please be your own health advocate and find a doctor who can be your "partner" in your health care, rather than one who prefers to follow their own agenda without your input. Too many people's lives are being affected by doctors' complacency and we need to be the ones to change this. We have to remember that our doctors work for us. Without patients they would not be in business. There are some great ones out there, but we need to be diligent in our efforts to find them.

Now that I am on a safe and proper taper plan, working with a doctor who specializes in addiction medicine (as a partner and not the sole decision maker), I know that I am finally moving in the right direction. I do not know what is in store for me down the road with further withdrawal, but I do know that in the future I will be symptom free and be able to live a normal life without the need for medications. I hope the same for all of you are suffering with the same situation and if you are experiencing strange symptoms that no one understands, please look to your drugs.

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