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Benzodiazepine Use and Misuse in Older Adults

University of Maine Center on Aging

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Benzodiazepine Use and Misuse in Older Adults



Use

- Benzodiazepines (BZDs) are widely prescribed for individuals over the age of 65 years, with average estimates of use at 25%, although exact data are scarce
- Most commonly prescribed for anxiety and insomnia

Misuse

- BZDs are the most commonly misused and abused medication by elders
- Long-term use of BZDs (i.e., over 30 days) is significantly higher in older than younger adults throughout North America, Australia, and Europe
- Long-term use or misuse of BZDs associated with:
 - *polypharmacy*
 - *chronic restless sleep*
 - *being female*
 - *being divorced*
 - *greater contact with medical services*
 - *being institutionalized or residing in a nursing home*
 - *comorbid medical and psychiatric (esp. nervous) conditions*

Factors Associated with Misuse

- Inappropriate prescribing (overprescribing of long-acting BZDs, long-term use, over-dosing, prescribing in combination with other psychotropics)
- Taking meds contrary to physician orders (skipping or taking extra doses)
 - As many as 15% of elders skip doses to make medications last longer
 - 17% buy only part of a prescription to save money
- Signs of misuse/abuse often confused with a medical condition or old age itself



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