



### Why is patient taking a BZRA?

If unsure, find out if history of anxiety, past psychiatrist consult, whether may have been started in hospital for sleep, or for grief reaction.

- Insomnia on its own OR insomnia where underlying comorbidities managed
- For those ≥ 65 years of age:** taking BZRA regardless of duration (avoid as first line therapy in older people)
- For those 18-64 years of age:** taking BZRA > 4 weeks

- Other sleeping disorders (e.g. restless legs)
- Unmanaged anxiety, depression, physical or mental condition that may be causing or aggravating insomnia
- Benzodiazepine effective specifically for anxiety
- Alcohol withdrawal

**Engage patients** (discuss potential risks, benefits, withdrawal plan, symptoms and duration)

### Recommend Deprescribing

### Continue BZRA

- Minimize use of drugs that worsen insomnia (e.g. caffeine, alcohol etc.)
- Treat underlying condition
- Consider consulting psychologist or psychiatrist or sleep specialist

### Taper and then stop BZRA

(taper slowly in collaboration with patient, for example ~25% every two weeks, and if possible, 12.5% reductions near end and/or planned drug-free days)

- **For those ≥ 65 years of age** (strong recommendation from systematic review and GRADE approach)
- **For those 18-64 years of age** (weak recommendation from systematic review and GRADE approach)
- Offer behavioural sleeping advice; consider CBT if available (see reverse)

### Monitor every 1-2 weeks for duration of tapering

#### Expected benefits:

- May improve alertness, cognition, daytime sedation and reduce falls

#### Withdrawal symptoms:

- Insomnia, anxiety, irritability, sweating, gastrointestinal symptoms (all usually mild and last for days to a few weeks)

#### Use non-drug approaches to manage insomnia

Use behavioral approaches and/or CBT (see reverse)

#### If symptoms relapse:

##### Consider

- Maintaining current BZRA dose for 1-2 weeks, then continue to taper at slow rate

##### Alternate drugs

- Other medications have been used to manage insomnia. Assessment of their safety and effectiveness is beyond the scope of this algorithm. See BZRA deprescribing guideline for details.

© Use freely, with credit to the authors. Not for commercial use. Do not modify or translate without permission.



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. Contact [deprescribing@bruyere.org](mailto:deprescribing@bruyere.org) or visit [deprescribing.org](http://deprescribing.org) for more information.

Pottie K, Thompson W, Davies S, Grenier J, Sadowski C, Welch V, Holbrook A, Boyd C, Swenson JR, Ma A, Farrell B (2016). Evidence-based clinical practice guideline for deprescribing benzodiazepine receptor agonists. Unpublished manuscript.

Adapted with permission for use in Australia



deprescribing.org





## BZRA Availability in Australia

BZRA	Strength
Alprazolam (Xanax <sup>®</sup> ) <sup>T</sup>	0.25mg, 0.5mg, 1mg
Bromazepam (Lexotan <sup>®</sup> ) <sup>T</sup>	3mg, 6mg
Clobazam (Frisium) <sup>T</sup>	10mg
Diazepam (Valium <sup>®</sup> ) <sup>T,L</sup>	2mg, 5mg
Flunitrazepam (Hypnodorm <sup>®</sup> ) <sup>T</sup>	1mg
Lorazepam (Ativan <sup>®</sup> ) <sup>T</sup>	1mg, 2mg
Nitrazepam (Mogadon <sup>®</sup> ) <sup>T</sup>	5mg
Oxazepam (Serepax <sup>®</sup> ) <sup>T</sup>	15mg, 30mg
Temazepam (Normison, Temaze <sup>®</sup> ) <sup>T</sup>	10mg
Zolpidem (Stilnox <sup>®</sup> ) <sup>T</sup>	10mg, 6.25mg, 12.5mg
Zopiclone (Imovane <sup>®</sup> ) <sup>T</sup>	7.5mg

Tablet, L = Liquid

## BZRA Side Effects

- **BZRAs have been associated with:**
  - physical dependence, falls, memory disorder, dementia, functional impairment, daytime sedation and motor vehicle accidents
- **Risks increase in older persons**

## Engaging patients and caregivers

### Patients should understand:

- The rationale for deprescribing (associated risks of continued BZRA use, reduced long-term efficacy)
- Withdrawal symptoms (insomnia, anxiety) may occur but are usually mild, transient and short-term (days to a few weeks)
- They are part of the tapering plan, and can control tapering rate and duration

## Tapering doses

- No published evidence exists to suggest switching to long-acting BZRAs reduces incidence of withdrawal symptoms or is more effective than tapering shorter-acting BZRAs
- If dosage forms do not allow 25% reduction, consider 50% reduction initially using drug-free days during latter part of tapering, or switch to lorazepam or oxazepam for final taper steps

## Behavioural management

### Primary care:

1. Go to bed only when sleepy
2. Do not use bed or bedroom for anything but sleep (or intimacy)
3. If not asleep within about 20-30min at the beginning of the night or after an awakening, exit the bedroom
4. If not asleep within 20-30 min on returning to bed, repeat #3
5. Use alarm to awaken at the same time every morning
6. Do not nap
7. Avoid caffeine after noon
8. Avoid exercise, nicotine, alcohol, and big meals within 2 hrs of bedtime

### Institutional care:

1. Pull up curtains during the day to obtain bright light exposure
2. Keep alarm noises to a minimum
3. Increase daytime activity & discourage daytime sleeping
4. Reduce number of naps (no more than 30mins and no naps after 2pm)
5. Offer warm decaf drink, warm milk at night
6. Restrict food, caffeine, smoking before bedtime
7. Have the resident toilet before going to bed
8. Encourage regular bedtime and rising times
9. Avoid waking at night to provide direct care
10. Offer backrub, gentle massage

## Using CBT

### What is cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)?

- CBT includes 5-6 educational sessions about sleep/insomnia, stimulus control, sleep restriction, sleep hygiene, relaxation training and support

### Does it work?

- CBT has been shown in trials to improve sleep outcomes with sustained long-term benefits

### Who can provide it?

- Clinical psychologists usually deliver CBT, however, others can be trained or can provide aspects of CBT education; self-help programs are available

### How can providers and patients find out about it?

- Some resources can be found here: <http://sleepwellns.ca/>

© Use freely, with credit to the authors. Not for commercial use. Do not modify or translate without permission.



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. Contact [deprescribing@bruyere.org](mailto:deprescribing@bruyere.org) or visit [deprescribing.org](http://deprescribing.org) for more information.

Pottie K, Thompson W, Davies S, Grenier J, Sadowski C, Welch V, Holbrook A, Boyd C, Swenson JR, Ma A, Farrell B (2016). Evidence-based clinical practice guideline for deprescribing benzodiazepine receptor agonists. Unpublished manuscript.

Adapted with permission for use in Australia



deprescribing.org

INSTITUT DE RECHERCHE

Bruyère  
RESEARCH INSTITUTE

open+  
CENTRE FOR HEALTH RESEARCH COLLABORATION