

Information on Sleeping Tablets

What are sleeping tablets?

In the 1960's tranquillisers and sleeping tablets (known as Benzodiazepines) became widely prescribed to help people with problems such as bereavement, anxiety and insomnia.

Little was known about the side effects of these drugs or about the problem of addiction associated with them. Nowadays, they are not prescribed for more than 4 weeks.

They are used to relax patients prior to undergoing operations or, short term, to help patients through crises.

The Effects of sleeping tablets and tranquillisers.

Though tranquillisers and sleeping tablets may offer short term relief from anxiety and insomnia there are draw backs:

There may be unpleasant side effects, such as drowsiness, headaches, blurred vision and unsteadiness, affected co-ordination and impaired memory. Much rarer are such effects as anxiety, hostility and aggression, weight gain, rashes, sexual problems or irregular periods.

Women should avoid these medicines throughout pregnancy, and breast feeding periods. NB. Women finding themselves pregnant must not stop taking the medication abruptly but should follow the recommended withdrawal programme.

Side effects can be exaggerated by taking drugs such as antihistamines, pain killers and antidepressants. NB. Alcohol should be avoided.

THIS MEDICATION IS HIGHLY ADDICTIVE AFTER AS LITTLE TIME AS 4 WEEKS.

As a result patients who have no knowledge of a suitable withdrawal programme may try to stop suddenly in which case they may suffer serious consequences. Even stopping too quickly may cause rebound whereby the original problem worsens owing to the fact that the dose the patient is taking no longer satisfies his physical craving.

At this point the alternatives are:

1. Increase the dose, which is not recommended as it only delays the inevitable.
2. Continue with the same dose whereby the unpleasant feelings (such as acute anxiety, irrational fears, agoraphobia and inexplicable physical symptoms) may increase.
3. Receive help and support by following a carefully planned Benzodiazepine Withdrawal Programme.

Patients who have used tranquillisers for an extended period may convince themselves that symptoms are a sign of ageing as long term use dulls the senses. Colours appear grey, sounds are muffled and there is a lack of awareness of the world around them.

Would you like to know more?

If you feel you may be experiencing some of the problems mentioned on this sheet and/or are taking any of the listed medication and would like to know more then we would recommend that you discuss with your doctor, who is always willing to discuss the issues involved and help give some possible solutions to this problem.

Just ask one of the receptionists for further details or to arrange an appointment.