

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

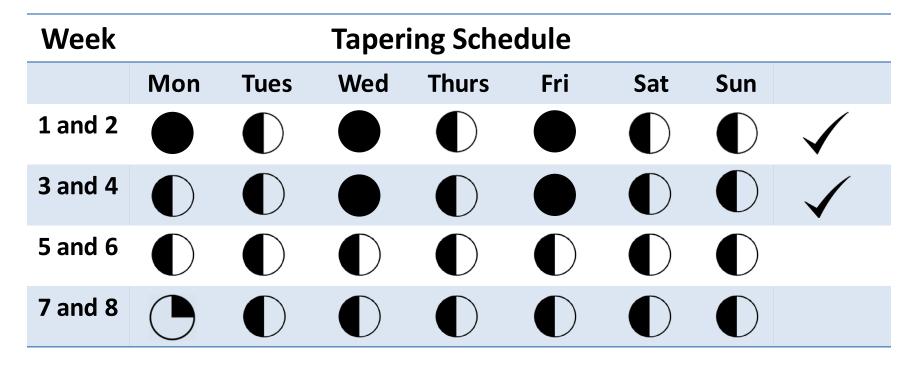
Week of Taper	Change in Dose
Weeks 1-2	10%-25% reduction
Weeks 3+	10% reduction
When 20% of dosage remains	5% reduction

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

Pharmacist's Letter. 2014 July; 30(8):300806 *Current Psychiatry*. 2012 April; 11(4):55-64



Example Taper



Adapted from: Tannenbaum et al. "You May De 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

Am Fam Physician. 2015 May 1; 91(9):617-624. Pharmacist's Letter. 2014 July; 30(8):300806



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 dose during chronic tapering?

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

Answer: B

