

# Coming off Benzodiazepines

Benzodiazepines have been used since 1960 to treat sleep and anxiety. They work quickly, but lack long-term benefits and can cause problems overtime. They can make people feel unmotivated, depressed, or have poor memory, cognition, and stress management abilities. Their balance is not as good, and they have more falls and car accidents. Even breathing is affected, with higher rates of lung problems and infections like bronchitis.

Those problems improve after coming off the medication, but it has to be tapered slowly to avoid withdrawal problems, including:

*Insomnia, anxiety, tremor, irritability, stomach distress, headache, ear ringing, dizziness, muscle twitching, racing heart, depression, nightmares, increased or abnormal perception, feeling outside your body, paranoia, and seizures.*

The longer you have been on the medicine, and the higher the dose, the more likely you are to have withdrawal symptoms.

Below is a sample schedule for tapering off benzos, but everyone is different so this needs to be personalized. In general, it's best to lower the amount every 1-4 weeks. In the beginning, you can lower by larger amounts. The final stages of the taper are more difficult, so we lower by smaller amounts at that time.

During the taper, spread the dose out throughout the day (eg, 2-3 times a day). If you need smaller doses than are available at the pharmacy to accomplish the taper, you can use a liquid form or liquefy your tablets with these "microdosing" directions:

[chrisaikenmd.com/microdosing](http://chrisaikenmd.com/microdosing)

Avoid alcohol during the taper (no more than one drink a day). Alcohol has potent effects on the benzodiazepine receptor in the brain.

On the back is a rating scale you can complete once a week while tapering. Find additional scales at:

[chrisaikenmd.com/benzowd](http://chrisaikenmd.com/benzowd)

More information is in the *Ashton Manual*: [www.benzo.org.uk/manual](http://www.benzo.org.uk/manual)

## Benzodiazepine Tapering

Duration of regular (daily) use	Recommended taper length
Less than 2 months	Taper may not be required. Reduce the benzo to "as needed" for 2-4 weeks, then stop
2-6 months	Gradually reduce dosage over 2 to 3 weeks
6-12 months	Gradually reduce dosage over 4 to 8 weeks
Over 1 year	Gradually reduce dosage over 2 to 4 months

# Clinical Institute Withdrawal Assessment – Benzodiazepine (CIWA-B)

## Client reported symptoms

Please circle a number that best describes how you feel

score

- | 1.  | <b>Do you feel irritable?</b>  | 0 Not at all | 1 A little | 2 Moderately | 3 Quite a bit | 4 Extremely | <input type="radio"/> |
|-----|--|--------------|------------|--------------|---------------|-------------|-----------------------|
| 2.  | <b>Do you feel fatigued?</b>   | 0 Not at all | 1 A little | 2 Moderately | 3 Quite a bit | 4 Extremely | <input type="radio"/> |
| 3.  | <b>Do you feel tense?</b>  | 0 Not at all | 1 A little | 2 Moderately | 3 Quite a bit | 4 Extremely | <input type="radio"/> |
| 4.  | <b>Do you have difficulties concentrating?</b>                                     | 0 Not at all | 1 A little | 2 Moderately | 3 Quite a bit | 4 Extremely | <input type="radio"/> |
| 5.  | <b>Do you have any loss of appetite?</b>   | 0 Not at all | 1 A little | 2 Moderately | 3 Quite a bit | 4 Extremely | <input type="radio"/> |
| 6.  | <b>Have you any numbness or burning on your face, hands or feet?</b>               | 0 Not at all | 1 A little | 2 Moderately | 3 Quite a bit | 4 Extremely | <input type="radio"/> |
| 7.  | <b>Do you feel your heart racing? (palpitations)?</b>                              | 0 Not at all | 1 A little | 2 Moderately | 3 Quite a bit | 4 Extremely | <input type="radio"/> |
| 8.  | <b>Does your head feel full or achy?</b>   | 0 Not at all | 1 A little | 2 Moderately | 3 Quite a bit | 4 Extremely | <input type="radio"/> |
| 9.  | <b>Do you feel muscle aches or stiffness?</b>                                      | 0 Not at all | 1 A little | 2 Moderately | 3 Quite a bit | 4 Extremely | <input type="radio"/> |
| 10. | <b>Do you feel anxious, nervous or jittery?</b>                                    | 0 Not at all | 1 A little | 2 Moderately | 3 Quite a bit | 4 Extremely | <input type="radio"/> |
| 11. | <b>Do you feel upset?</b>  | 0 Not at all | 1 A little | 2 Moderately | 3 Quite a bit | 4 Extremely | <input type="radio"/> |
| 12. | <b>How restful was your sleep last night?</b>                                      | 4 Not at all | 3 A little | 2 Moderately | 1 Quite a bit | 0 Extremely | <input type="radio"/> |
| 13. | <b>Do you feel weak?</b>   | 0 Not at all | 1 A little | 2 Moderately | 3 Quite a bit | 4 Extremely | <input type="radio"/> |
| 14. | <b>Do you think you didn't have enough sleep last night?</b>                       | 0 Not at all | 1 A little | 2 Moderately | 3 Quite a bit | 4 Extremely | <input type="radio"/> |
| 15. | <b>Do you have any visual disturbances (sensitivity to light, blurred vision)?</b> | 0 Not at all | 1 A little | 2 Moderately | 3 Quite a bit | 4 Extremely | <input type="radio"/> |
| 16. | <b>Are you fearful?</b>  | 0 Not at all | 1 A little | 2 Moderately | 3 Quite a bit | 4 Extremely | <input type="radio"/> |
| 17. | <b>Have you been worrying about possible misfortunes lately?</b>                   | 0 Not at all | 1 A little | 2 Moderately | 3 Quite a bit | 4 Extremely | <input type="radio"/> |