

Medication Risk Alert: Opioids & Benzodiazepines



BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

Opioids & Benzodiazepines: A Deadly Combination.

As the anxiety of residents in nursing homes and other settings increases, clinicians may want to help them manage their symptoms by prescribing an anti-anxiety medication, such as a benzodiazepine. Prior to starting a benzodiazepine, the pharmacist will need to conduct a review of the resident's medication administration record to ensure that the resident is not also taking an opioid medication. Opioid overdose deaths often involve benzodiazepines.

What is a benzo? Benzodiazepines are central nervous system depressants used to sedate, induce sleep, prevent seizures, and relieve anxiety. Examples include alprazolam (Xanax®), diazepam (Valium®), and lorazepam (Ativan®).

What is an opioid? Opioids are a class of drugs that include synthetic opioids such as fentanyl and pain relievers; examples include oxycodone (OxyContin®), hydrocodone (Vicodin®), codeine, morphine, and the illegal drug, heroin.



Watch for opioid-benzodiazepine side effects:

- Falls
- Sleepiness and dizziness
- Confusion
- Constipation
- Nausea, vomiting, and dry mouth
- Depression
- Increased sensitivity to pain
- Physical dependence

Three quick, non-pharmacological ways to reduce anxiety:

- Deep breathing exercises
- Listen to relaxing music
- Visualizing a favorite place

Please see
Alliant [Comfort Menu](#)
for additional ideas.

