

# 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<sup>®</sup>), diazepam (Valium<sup>®</sup>), and lorazepam (Ativan<sup>®</sup>).

**What is an opioid?** Opioids are a class of drugs that include synthetic opioids such as fentanyl and pain relievers; examples include oxycodone (OxyContin<sup>®</sup>), hydrocodone (Vicodin<sup>®</sup>), 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 Quality's  
[Comfort Menu](#)  
for additional ideas.

