

# Medication Risk Alert: Opioids & Benzodiazepines

## Opioids & Benzodiazepines: A Deadly Combination.

When a benzodiazepine (benzo) is prescribed to a resident for the management of severe anxiety, insomnia, alcohol withdrawal symptoms or other health related conditions, special precautions should be followed. Prior to starting the medication, 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 the Center of Excellence [Comfort Menu](#) for additional ideas.*

### Overdose Reversal Medications:

Naloxone (Narcan) is used to reverse the effects of an opioid overdose, but is ineffective in the reversal of a benzodiazepine overdose. Flumazenil (Romazicon) is the agent that will reverse a benzodiazepine overdose.

If you suspect a resident is experiencing an opioid or benzodiazepine overdose, administer the appropriate medication and call 911.