



# Sleeping pills and sedatives

Avoid dependence

Information,  
advice and support

## When are sleeping pills and sedatives prescribed?

As their name suggests, sleeping pills and sedatives are prescribed for sleeping problems or alleviating stress and anxiety. They provide rapid relief and taking them short-term can be both useful and advisable. Sleeping pills and sedatives belonging to the class of medications known as benzodiazepines and schedule Z drugs (see boxes) require a prescription and must always be prescribed by a medical doctor.

## Potential risks?

Like all medications, sleeping pills and sedatives can sometimes also trigger adverse side effects. Continued intake of benzodiazepines and schedule Z drugs (see boxes) can also lead to dependence within a few weeks. Physical and mental dependence often pass unnoticed and can therefore persist for many years. The higher the dose and the longer the intake, the greater their impact. Furthermore, these medications do not target causes but merely relieve symptoms. Consequently, they should not be taken for prolonged periods.

## Potential risks and consequences of dependence

- Increased risk of accidents: in the case of elderly subjects, a fall can lead to loss of independence.
- Emotional numbness
- Poor concentration
- Lethargy and delayed reaction (Caution in road traffic)

## Avoid dependence: What you can do

- Ask your medical doctor or pharmacist whether the prescribed medications trigger dependence and what you need to do to avoid this risk.
- Strictly follow the prescribed dose and duration of treatment.
- Inquire about other treatment options.

## Benzodiazepines and Z-drugs

Sedatives and sleeping pills belonging to the class of benzodiazepines and schedule Z-drugs can trigger dependence. The following is not an exhaustive list of all products available in Switzerland, but a selection of frequently prescribed medications. (The same medications are sold under different brand names in different countries.)

- **Sedatives** (Benzodiazepine class): Anxiolit<sup>®</sup>, Demetrim<sup>®</sup>, Lexotanil<sup>®</sup>, Lorasifar<sup>®</sup>, Pacement<sup>®</sup>, Seresta<sup>®</sup>, Stesolid<sup>®</sup>, Temesta<sup>®</sup>, Tranxilium<sup>®</sup>, Urbanyl<sup>®</sup>, Valium<sup>®</sup> and Xanax<sup>®</sup>
- **Sleeping pills**  
Benzodiazepine class: Dalmadorm<sup>®</sup>, Dormicum<sup>®</sup>, Halcion<sup>®</sup>, Loramet<sup>®</sup>, Mogadon<sup>®</sup>, Noctamid<sup>®</sup>, Normison<sup>®</sup>, Rohypnol<sup>®</sup> and Somnium<sup>®</sup>  
Schedule Z-drugs: Stilnox<sup>®</sup> and Zolpidem<sup>®</sup>

## **Alternative treatment options**

A number of different experts and institutions (see overleaf: treating the cause) are available to give help and advice. Sleeping problems, anxiety or stress can be triggered by mental or physical factors. A combination of both is often involved. Careful clarification is vital. Counselling and therapies help to treat emotional causes and provide solutions for dealing with sleeping problems or stress. Many of these options are covered by health insurance. Medical doctors or pharmacists can also recommend preparations that do not trigger dependence.

## **Sleeping problems – age-related**

Most people sleep less deeply as they get older and sleeping patterns are frequently interrupted. Here are a few tips to help you cope with these changes. For instance, you should be tired when you go to bed. You should try to go to bed at the same time every night and get up at the same time every morning. Don't try to catch up on missed sleep during the day, although a 20-minute nap after lunch will do you good.

## **Information on medicines**

- Medical doctors and/or pharmacists give good advice on medications.
- The package leaflet provides information on any risk of dependence, other adverse drug reactions and any incompatibility with alcohol.
- List of all medicines authorised in Switzerland: "Arzneimittel-Kompendium der Schweiz", [www.compendium.ch](http://www.compendium.ch)

## **Signs of dependence: you must look out for any of these**

If you notice any of the warning signs listed below, speak to a medical doctor or pharmacist.

- Drug fixation: those concerned refuse to go out without their tablets. Other forms of help, dose reduction or even stopping are resisted and trigger anxiety.
- Increased consumption: for instance, sleeping pills are also taken during the day to combat restlessness.
- Increased dose: the prescribed dosage is exceeded.
- Secrecy: tablets are taken secretly and there are furtive searches to find additional sources of supply.

## What do you do if you can't cope without medication?

Talk to your medical doctor if you think you have been taking medication for too long. Benzodiazepines or Z-drugs should not be stopped suddenly after prolonged use, but gradually under medical supervision. This is known as "tapering" the dose. If dependence already exists, psychotherapy can assist medically supervised withdrawal. It can also help you find coping strategies other than taking medication. For instance, some behavioural therapies may prove effective after only a few sessions. Appropriate behaviour patterns that nevertheless lead to sleep disorders are discussed at length and normal sleeping patterns are relearned.

## Treating causes

### **Schlaflabor, Klinik für Pneumologie, Universitätsspital Zürich**

Tests and treatments for sleep disorders

Tel.: 044 255 22 21

[www.pneumologie.usz.ch/unser\\_angebot](http://www.pneumologie.usz.ch/unser_angebot) (Schlafmedizin)

### **Search for psychotherapists**

The Föderation der Schweizer Psychologinnen und Psychologen (FSP) offers on-line links to therapists. Health insurance companies bear the cost of medically prescribed therapies or when additional insurance cover is available:

[www.psychologie.ch](http://www.psychologie.ch)

The Schweizerische Gesellschaft für Psychiatrie und Psychotherapie (SGPP) provides an on-line link to psychiatrists at:

[www.psychiatrie.ch/sgpp](http://www.psychiatrie.ch/sgpp)

## Treating dependence

### **Arud (Centre for Dependence/Addiction Medicine)**

Tel.: 058 360 50 00, [www.arud.ch](http://www.arud.ch)

### **Forel Klinik**

Tel.: 052 369 11 11, [www.forel-klinik.ch](http://www.forel-klinik.ch)

### **Integrierte Psychiatrie Winterthur – Zürcher Unterland (IPW)**

Tel.: 052 224 33 33, [www.ipw.zh.ch](http://www.ipw.zh.ch)

### **Integrierte Suchthilfe Winterthur**

Tel.: 052 267 59 59, [www.sucht.winterthur.ch](http://www.sucht.winterthur.ch)

### **Psychiatrische Universitätsklinik Zürich (PUK)**

Tel.: 044 384 21 11, [www.pukzh.ch](http://www.pukzh.ch)

---

## On-line advice

Those affected and their relatives can get online advice on dependence issues at [www.safezone.ch](http://www.safezone.ch).

## Further questions

ZFPS (Zürcher Fachstelle zur Prävention des Suchtmittelmissbrauchs) – Find contact details for other addiction/dependence counselling centres in your region of Canton Zurich. Tel.: 044 271 87 23, [info@zfps.ch](mailto:info@zfps.ch), [www.zfps.ch](http://www.zfps.ch)

## Order

Download or order this and other flyers at [www.suchtpraevention-zh.ch](http://www.suchtpraevention-zh.ch) → Publikationen → Informationsmaterial.