

Dear Patient,

You have been given this information sheet because you have been taking sleeping tablets for a time. These include tablets called benzodiazepines, such as temazepam, loprazolam, lormetazepam, nitrazepam, and “Z” drugs, such as zaleplon, zolpidem, and zopiclone.

Sleeping tablets may cause significant problems, which include:

1. **Drowsiness and clumsiness:**
 - a. People taking sleeping tablets are known to have more accidents such as falls and car-related incidents, therefore it may not be safe to drive or operate machinery.
 - b. Older people taking sleeping tablets have an increased risk of falling and sustaining bone fractures such as hip injury.
2. **Mood and mental changes:** Some people can become aggressive, confused, forgetful, or depressed.
3. **Dependence and tolerance:** Your body may rapidly get used to the effect of sleeping tablets, hence they may fail to help if you keep taking them. Some people may become addicted to sleeping tablets (i.e. dependence problems), which may make it difficult to stop taking them and may cause withdrawal symptoms. Typical withdrawal symptoms include anxiety, panic attacks, sweating, headaches, and shaking. Other symptoms may include the inability to sleep, sickness, or being oversensitive to light and sound.
4. **Dementia, Alzheimer’s disease and death:** There is evidence that people who take sleeping tablets are at increased risk of developing dementia, Alzheimer’s disease and premature death.

If you feel drowsy the next day, do not drive or operate machinery. Avoid alcohol. Never give your sleeping tablets to anyone and always keep them in a safe place such as a locked cupboard.

Ideally sleeping tablet prescriptions should only last for a short period such as a week.

IMPORTANT. Do not stop taking your sleeping tablets suddenly if you have been taking them for longer than four weeks, as this may cause problems. Make an appointment with a clinician at the surgery to discuss how to stop your sleeping tablets safely.

What if you have been taking sleeping tablets regularly for some time?

As a rule, you should consider reducing or stopping them with advice from your doctor.

- Do it gradually: reduce the dose a little at a time.

- Pick a good time to do it; it is best to wait until your stress levels are as low as possible. Consider stopping the tablets whilst on holiday or when you have less pressure from work or family pressures etc.
- There is a possibility that you will have worse sleep when undertaking a tablet reduction regime. This is normal and will pass. However, most people who reduce or stop sleeping tablet medication say they feel much better mentally and physically when they have stopped taking the tablets.

There are plenty of other ways to help you with your sleep including:

1. Establishing fixed times for going to bed and waking up.
2. Creating a relaxing bedtime routine.
3. Only going to bed when you feel tired.
4. Maintaining a comfortable sleeping environment that's not too hot, cold, noisy or bright.
5. Not napping during the day.
6. Avoiding caffeine, nicotine and alcohol in the afternoon, evenings or late at night.
7. Avoiding eating a heavy meal or exercising vigorously late at night.
8. Avoiding screens for an hour before bed.
9. Look for possible causes of sleep interference such as pain, indigestion, breathlessness or itching. They can often be treated without sleeping tablets.

For support with your sleep please refer yourself to a new NHS service called sleep station: www.sleepstation.org.uk

Or Time to Talk <https://www.sussexcommunity.nhs.uk/services/time-to-talk-nhs-talking-therapies-in-west-sussex/109066>

Best wishes and good luck!

Medical Team, Strand Surgery

Further information

- Good sleep hygiene: <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Insomnia/Pages/Prevention.aspx>
- Sleeping well leaflet: www.rcpsych.ac.uk/healthadvice/problemsdisorders/sleepingwell.aspx
- Benzodiazepines: www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mentalhealthinfo/treatments/benzodiazepines.aspx
- Stopping benzodiazepines and Z-drugs: <http://patient.info/health/stopping-benzodiazepines-and-z-drugs>
- Battle against tranquillisers: <http://bataid.org>
- Professor Matt Walker book – why we sleep?
- Podcast – Feel Better, Live More with Dr Rangan Chatterjee