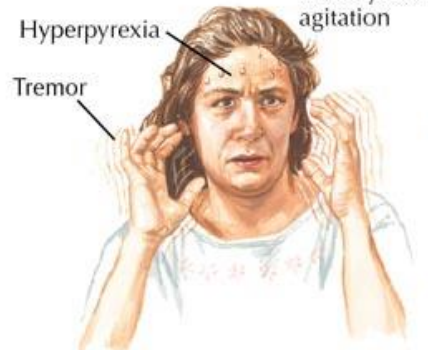


Benzodiazepine dependence – identification and management

Dr Bhaskar Punukollu MBBS, Dip Mgt, MRCPsych
Consultant Psychiatrist

High-dose withdrawal



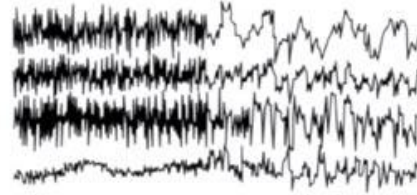
Anxiety and agitation

Hyperpyrexia

Tremor



Frank psychosis



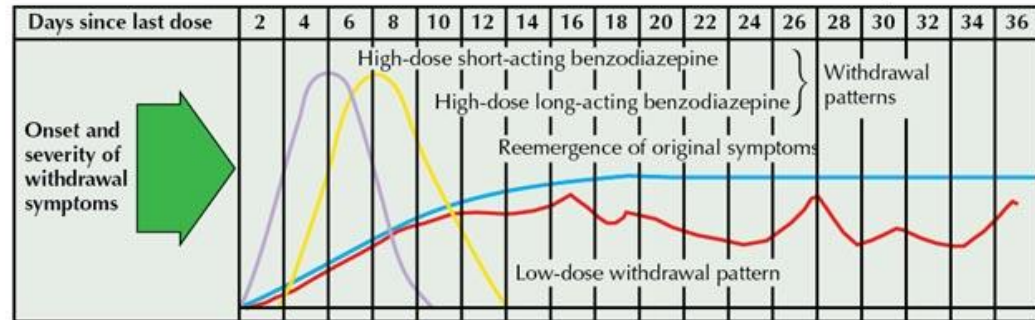
Seizures



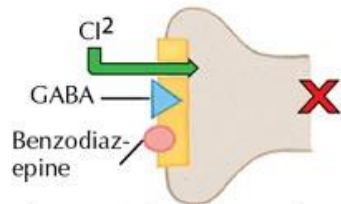
Insomnia and nightmares

High-dose benzodiazepine withdrawal produces signs and symptoms similar to alcohol withdrawal.

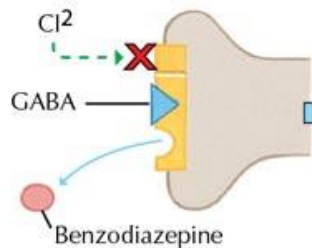
JOHN A. CRAIG, M.D.
C. Machado, M.D.



Low-dose (therapeutic) withdrawal



At therapeutic levels, benzodiazepines act synergistically with GABA to inhibit neurotransmission, preventing anxiety.



Withdrawing long-term benzodiazepine causes loss of synergism with GABA inhibition, resulting in recurrence of original symptoms and low-dose withdrawal syndrome.



Anxiety

Sensory hypersensitivity

Sound

Smell

Light

Touch

Taste



Depression and depersonalization

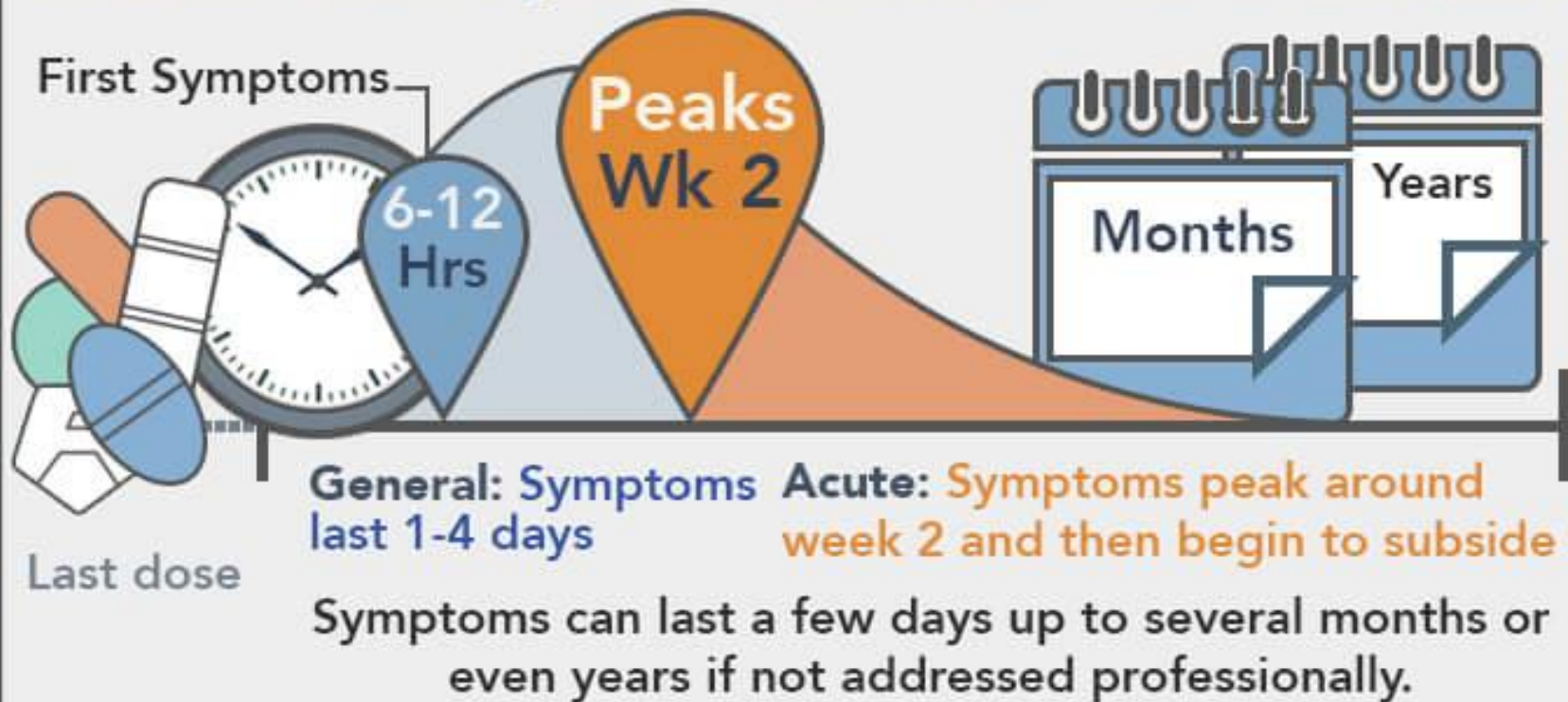


Fasciculation

Low-dose withdrawal syndrome.

Symptoms typical of sedative/hypnotic withdrawal: fluctuating hypersensitivity to sensory input, muscle twitching, depression, and depersonalization.

Benzodiazepine Withdrawal Timeline



What are the harms associated with long term benzodiazepine use?

- Evidence exists for increased risk(s) of:
 - **Cognitive impairment** (Barker et al, 2004)
 - **Falls** (Bartlett et al, 2009)
 - **Drug related deaths** (Park et al, 2015)

Widespread misuse of these drugs results in deaths, especially when combined with other drugs and/or alcohol...



Case in point - Michael Jackson died from propofol and benzodiazepine (lorazepam and midazolam) overdose.

What are the potential benefits of benzodiazepine use?

- Useful in acute, severe anxiety/ panic disorder.
- Can be the only effective option in treatment refractory long-term anxiety disorders (BAP Guidelines).
- Helpful in severe insomnia.

When is it appropriate to prescribe benzodiazepines?

- Best avoid starting benzos anew.
- Where possible limit to acute severe anxiety for 2-3 weeks e.g. Grief reaction/ traumatic event.
- Probably best avoid for flying as well, except for those with severe phobias/ very long journeys – Australia.

What to do if someone demands benzodiazepines?

- Difficult to get a picture of benzo use within a short time frame.
- Consider the history and plan a careful reduction (Ashton Manual).
- An informal contract can be helpful, agreeing length of detoxification and medications to be used.
- Can refer to a psychiatrist if in doubt.

What to do in the elderly

- Benzodiazepines are clearly linked with increased risk of cognitive impairment and falls.
- However if long term benzodiazepine use has been a problem, it may be best to continue prescribing.
- Dose consolidation can be of value.

Managing comorbidity

- Treat depression as with other comorbid conditions.
- sertraline which has good anxiolytic and antidepressant properties.
- Try to achieve an optimal dosage.

Services in Camden

- Camden Drug Service (Margarete Centre, 108 Hampstead Road, NW1 2LS – 02033176000)
- REST service – MIND (counselling support and group therapy for sleeping tablet misuse)
- Specialist nurse allied to the REST service due to commence in next 3 months, will be there to support GPs, further information in due course.