

# Physician Fact Sheet on Prescription of Benzodiazepines for Persons with Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (MR/DD)

1. All benzodiazepines act at the GABA receptor in the brain.
2. All benzodiazepines can produce sedation, intoxication, confusion, or disinhibition in the patient with MR/DD.
3. The risk for drug-induced falls or other accidental injuries depends on the severity of retardation and other neurological impairments.
4. Benzodiazepines may “improve” abnormal behaviors by sedating the patient.
5. Benzodiazepines can be prescribed for anxiety disorders that fail to respond to behavioral therapies or antidepressants.
6. Long half-life benzodiazepines, e.g., Librium, Valium, etc., can produce significant sedation.
7. Benzodiazepines are addictive and should be tapered when prescribed for longer than three months.
8. The initial and maintenance doses of benzodiazepines should be substantially reduced for the patient with MR/DD, e.g., 1/4 to 1/2 of normal doses.
9. Benzodiazepines can be used for specific types of seizure disorders and muscle spasms.
10. Chronic benzodiazepine use is not recommended to treat insomnia.
11. Avoid the use of more than one benzodiazepine in any patient.
12. Xanax can be very addictive and produce significant withdrawal symptoms.

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