

Physician Fact Sheet on Prescription Sedative-Hypnotics for the Patient with Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (MR/DD)

1. Sedative-hypnotics like benzodiazepines, antihistamines, etc., can produce serious side effects in the person with MR/DD.
2. Most problems with sleep respond best to behavioral interventions.
3. Over-the-counter preparations that contain diphenhydramine or hydroxyzine produce serious side-effects without significant improvement of sleep.
4. Barbiturates and other old sedatives rarely assist patients with sleep disturbance.
5. Benzodiazepines are effective for short-term sleep problems; however, long-term prescription produces tolerance and rebound symptoms.
6. Long-term use of benzodiazepines often requires increasing doses with diminishing sleep.
7. Long, half-life benzodiazepines, e.g., Valium, Librium, produce significant daytime drowsiness and toxicity.
8. Sleeping agents, such as zolpidem, can be used on a regular but not on a daily basis.
9. Low-dose Desyrel (25-50 mgm) can be used as a sleep medication.
10. Alcohol disrupts normal sleep and produces hangovers.

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