

THE DANGERS OF BENZODIAZEPINE WITHDRAWAL

WHY QUITTING COLD TURKEY CAN BE DEADLY—AND HOW TO DETOX SAFELY



📍 SAN DIEGO, CA

☎ (866) 393-4330

🌐 [SANDIGODETOX.COM](https://sandigodetox.com)





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What Are Benzodiazepines, and Why Are They Addictive?

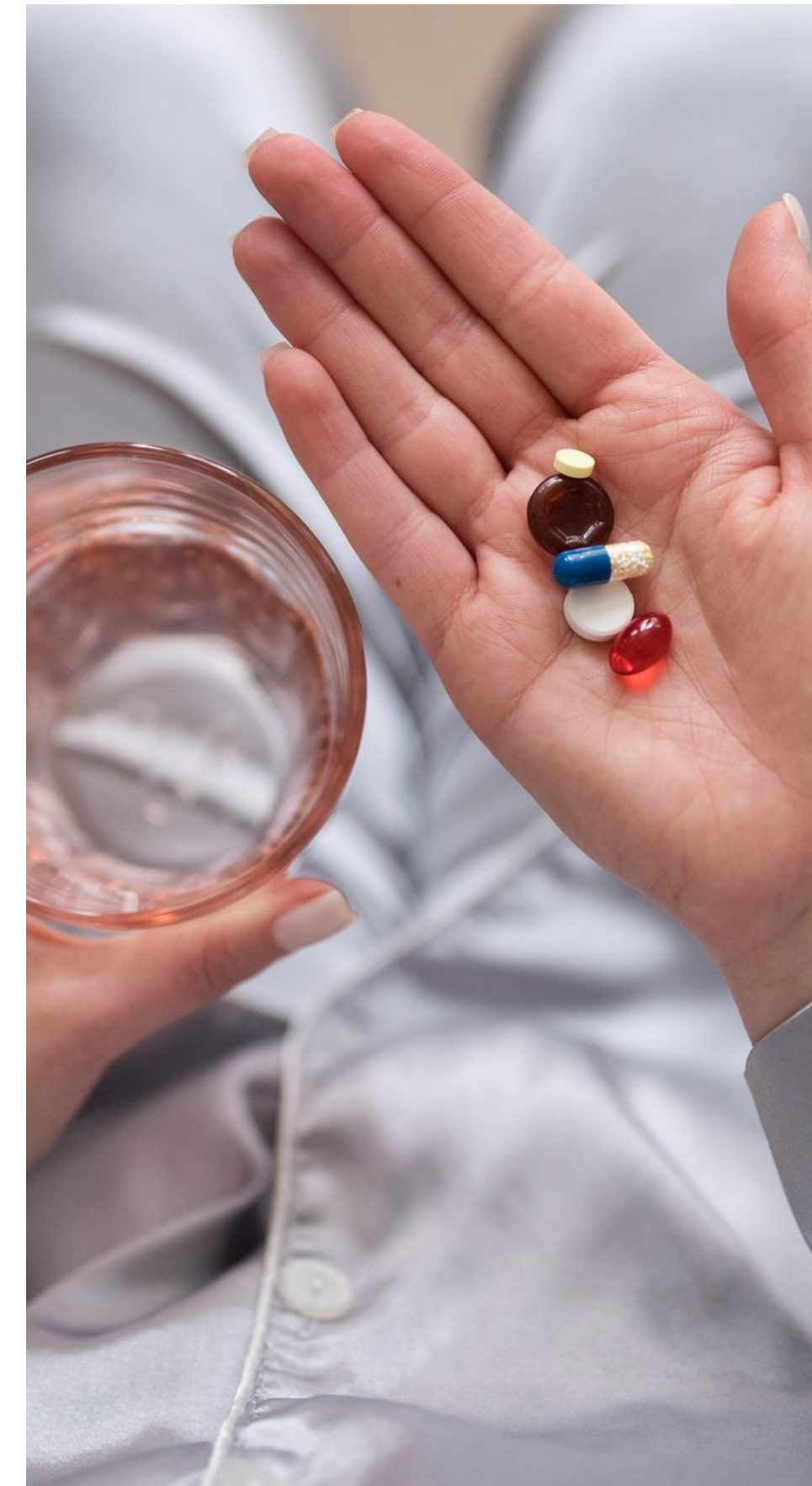
Benzodiazepines — often called “benzos” — are prescription medications commonly used to treat anxiety, panic attacks, insomnia, and seizures. Popular examples include Xanax (alprazolam), Ativan (lorazepam), Valium (diazepam), and Klonopin (clonazepam).

These drugs work by enhancing the effect of a neurotransmitter called GABA, which slows brain activity and creates a calming, sedative effect. But over time, the brain adapts. The same dose no longer works as effectively, leading many people to take more — often without realizing they’re developing a dependence.

Why They’re Addictive:

- ◆ Fast-acting relief makes them easy to rely on emotionally and physically.
- ◆ Tolerance builds quickly, requiring higher doses for the same effect.
- ◆ Withdrawal symptoms are severe, which makes stopping difficult without help.

Many people begin with a legitimate prescription, but due to the way benzodiazepines rewire brain chemistry, long-term use—even at prescribed doses—can result in addiction.





Signs of Benzodiazepine Dependence

Because benzodiazepines are often prescribed by a doctor, it can be hard to recognize when use has shifted from therapeutic to dependent — especially when taken as prescribed. But dependence doesn't always look like addiction in the traditional sense. It can start subtly and progress quickly.

Common Signs You May Be Dependent:

- ◆ Needing more of the medication to feel calm or to sleep.
- ◆ Running out of prescriptions early or thinking constantly about your next dose.
- ◆ Experiencing withdrawal symptoms between doses — such as irritability, sweating, tremors, or anxiety.
- ◆ Using benzodiazepines to get through daily situations, like work or social gatherings.
- ◆ Feeling unable to function without them, even for a short time.
- ◆ Trying to cut back or stop but failing, due to intense symptoms or emotional distress.

Even if the use began with a doctor's order, your brain can quickly become conditioned to rely on benzodiazepines just to feel "normal." That's not a sign of weakness — it's a sign that your brain chemistry has adapted in a way that needs professional support to reset safely.

What Happens When You Stop?

When you stop taking benzodiazepines — especially after regular use over weeks, months, or years — your brain is left without the calming influence it has come to depend on. Since benzodiazepines suppress nervous system activity, suddenly removing them causes the nervous system to rebound in an overactive state, often leading to intense and dangerous symptoms.

Common Withdrawal Symptoms:

- ◆ Severe anxiety or panic attacks
- ◆ Tremors or twitching
- ◆ Insomnia or vivid, disturbing dreams
- ◆ Intense irritability or mood swings
- ◆ Muscle cramps and body aches
- ◆ Depression and suicidal thoughts
- ◆ Nausea, vomiting, or digestive issues
- ◆ Seizures or psychosis in severe cases
- ◆ Sweating and rapid heartbeat

These symptoms can begin within hours to a few days of the last dose, depending on the specific benzodiazepine and how long it was used.

Protracted Withdrawal (PAWS)

In some cases, symptoms can linger for weeks or even months, especially with long-term use.

This is known as **Post-Acute Withdrawal Syndrome (PAWS)** and may include:

- ◆ Lingering anxiety
- ◆ Sensory hypersensitivity
- ◆ Cognitive fog or difficulty concentrating
- ◆ Ongoing insomnia or fatigue

Without proper medical support, the withdrawal process can feel unbearable — and in some cases, life-threatening.

The Dangers of Quitting Cold Turkey

WHY GOING IT ALONE CAN BE DEADLY

Benzodiazepines aren't like other substances. Quitting abruptly — even if you're just trying to "tough it out" — can lead to life-threatening complications. That's not fear-mongering; it's a medically documented reality.

What Makes Benzodiazepine Withdrawal So Dangerous?

Many people begin with a legitimate prescription, but due to the way benzodiazepines rewire brain chemistry, long-term use—even at prescribed doses—can result in addiction.

Some of the most serious risks include:

- ◆ Death, especially when withdrawal is not medically managed
- ◆ Suicidal ideation due to intense emotional crashes
- ◆ Dangerously high blood pressure and heart rate
- ◆ Delirium and paranoia
- ◆ Grand mal seizures
- ◆ Hallucinations or psychosis

In some cases, these symptoms can appear even if you've only been taking benzodiazepines for a few weeks. **And for those with long-term use or higher doses, the risk increases dramatically.**



Medical Supervision vs. At-Home Withdrawal

WHY PROFESSIONAL DETOX CAN SAVE YOUR LIFE

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At-Home Withdrawal: What Usually Happens

- ◆ Withdrawal symptoms become overwhelming.
- ◆ You may panic, take more benzodiazepines, or turn to other substances for relief.
- ◆ Without medical monitoring, symptoms like seizures or hallucinations can strike without warning.
- ◆ Loved ones may not be equipped to recognize or respond to signs of a medical crisis.

This approach often leads to a dangerous cycle of trying to quit, suffering, then returning to use — reinforcing both physical and emotional dependency.

Discontinuing benzodiazepines, especially after long-term use, should be done gradually under medical supervision due to the risk of withdrawal complications. Abrupt cessation can lead to symptoms such as rebound anxiety, insomnia, irritability, muscle pain, and, in severe cases, seizures or psychosis. The likelihood and severity of withdrawal symptoms depend on the dosage, duration of use, and individual health factors. A slow tapering schedule, often guided by a healthcare professional in a detox facility, is the safest method to reduce these risks and support long-term recovery.

American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *Practice Guideline for the Treatment of Patients With Substance Use Disorders, Second Edition.*



Why Medical Detox is Different

In a professional detox setting, you're not alone — you're monitored and supported by a team of medical professionals trained to handle benzodiazepine withdrawal safely.

Medical detox can offer:

- ◆ 24/7 supervision to prevent and respond to seizures or complications
- ◆ Carefully managed tapering of medication to reduce shock to your system
- ◆ Nutrients and medications to ease physical symptoms
- ◆ Therapeutic support for anxiety, depression, or trauma
- ◆ A smoother, less traumatic withdrawal experience — and a better chance at long-term recovery

Detoxing in a medical environment is not a luxury — for many, it's the difference between life and death.



How San Diego Detox Can Help

At San Diego Detox, we specialize in helping individuals safely and comfortably withdraw from benzodiazepines — whether it's Xanax, Ativan, Klonopin, Valium, or another prescription. We understand that benzodiazepine dependence can feel confusing, overwhelming, and even frightening — especially if you've already tried to quit and struggled.

That's why our approach is medical, personalized, and compassionate.

What You Can Expect:

- ◆ A medically supervised taper that allows your body and brain to gradually adjust
- ◆ 24/7 clinical and medical support to monitor vital signs and manage symptoms
- ◆ A private, comfortable environment designed for healing
- ◆ Therapy and support to address anxiety, trauma, and emotional withdrawal
- ◆ Ongoing care planning, so you know what comes after detox

Whether you've been taking benzodiazepines for months or years, it's never too late to stop — and you don't have to do it alone.



If you or a loved one is struggling with benzodiazepine dependence, contact us today to learn more about our safe, medically supported detox program.

San Diego Detox is here to guide you every step of the way, with a team of experienced professionals dedicated to your success. Reach out today for a confidential consultation or visit our website to learn more about our programs.

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 **INFO@SANDIEGODETOX.COM**

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