

# Withdrawal from Benzodiazepines Mixed in BC's Illicit Drug Supply

If you've been using opioids, it's likely you've been using benzodiazepines (benzos) and benzo-like drugs (e.g., etizolam). These substances have been showing up in the illicit drug supply, especially mixed with opioids<sup>1</sup> and it's hard to know if benzos are in your drugs. When benzos are stopped suddenly you can experience withdrawal symptoms. Here is some information about withdrawal from benzos and benzo-like substances that can be serious and may need medical attention.

## More information on dependence and withdrawal



Benzos are used for anxiety and sleep; they slow breathing and heart rate

Withdrawal symptoms can last 10 days or longer and be serious in their effects

Depending on the type of benzo, withdrawal symptoms can start within 24 hours or possibly earlier, of stopping use

### You may not know you're taking benzos.

Withdrawal from Benzos can feel similar to opioid withdrawal, which can make it hard to know what symptoms you may be experiencing.

### Withdrawal symptoms characteristic of benzos/benzo-like drugs

headaches, aching skin, feeling emotional, or inability to sleep or have intense irritability, restlessness, anxiety, panic attacks, nausea, muscle twitching<sup>2-5</sup>

More severe withdrawal from benzos may include<sup>2,4</sup>:

- o Visual hallucinations (seeing things)
- o Confusion or having difficulty connecting to time and place
- o Seizures
- o Death

Even if you're getting regular urine drug tests, you could be exposed and not know. Some benzos and benzo-like substances don't show up.



If you're prescribed OAT and take your dose but continue to feel these symptoms, it may be benzo withdrawal. See your doctor

## For your safety



Benzos with opioids increase the likelihood of overdose. Naloxone will help restore breathing, but sedation can last for hours. Use an overdose prevention site and drug checking services, and carry a naloxone kit if you can. [FIND A SITE](#). Call ahead for hours

**Talk to a trusted provider about your options** if you've been exposed to benzos in opioids, you're experiencing withdrawal symptoms, or if you want to reduce or stop using benzos. Approaches to reducing or stopping benzos will vary. [Click here for more info](#)

Withdrawal symptoms from benzos can overlap with opioid withdrawal making it difficult to identify what symptoms you are experiencing

**Harms from benzo withdrawal is more likely with a sudden stop in use**

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[Do I Keep Giving Naloxone?](#)

[Responding to an opioid overdose with benzos or etizolam](#)

### References

- 1 BC Centre on Substance Use Drug Checking Project [Monthly Reports] <https://drugcheckingbc.ca/>
- 2 Benzodiazepine Withdrawal [patient education] [https://www.clinicalkey.com.ezproxy.library.ubc.ca/#!/content/patient\\_handout/5-s2.0-pe\\_221a8c00-93e3-4872-b749-ba7e7c5626ea](https://www.clinicalkey.com.ezproxy.library.ubc.ca/#!/content/patient_handout/5-s2.0-pe_221a8c00-93e3-4872-b749-ba7e7c5626ea)
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- 6 Moe, J. (2021). Alert! benzos on the rise in opioid overdoses in BC. BC Emergency Network <https://www.bcemergencynetwork.ca/lounge/alert-benzos-on-the-rise-in-illicit-opioid-overdoses-in-bc/>
- 7 Purssell et al. (2021). Potent sedatives in opioids in BC: implications for resuscitation, and benzo and etizolam withdrawal <https://bcmj.org/bccdc/potent-sedatives-opioids-bc-implications-resuscitation-and-benzodiazepine-and-etizolam>

