

Sedative-Hypnotic Fact Sheet

Common Sedative-Hypnotic

- Benzodiazepines (Ativan, Xanax, Librium, Valium, Restoril, Halcion)
- Barbiturates (Amytal, Nembutal, Phenobarb, Seconal)
- Non-Benzodiazepines/Non-Barbiturates (Noctec, Placidyl)

Overview/Description

Sedative-Hypnotics sedate the Central Nervous System (CNS depressants). Sedative-Hypnotics are usually prescribed to:

- control anxiety, and the symptoms of anxiety or panic attacks,
- to induce sleep, to relax skeletal muscles
- To control hypertension,
- To diminish severe alcoholism or heroin withdrawal,
- Sedatives (Xanax, Valium) help control anxiety and restlessness
- Hypnotics induce sleep along with depression of most body functions including breathing and muscular coordination

Short-Term Effects

- Produces feelings of relaxation, drowsiness, lethargy
- Reduced tension, loss of inhibition
- Feeling of well being
- Impairment of mental function & physical coordination
- High doses induce sedation and even unconsciousness

Long-Term Effects

- Lack of energy, decreased motivation
- Irritability, Headaches
- Sexual problems and menstrual irregularities
- May experience confusion, slurred speech, muscle weakness, problems with memory and judgment. Anxiety, insomnia, hostility or even rage
- Use during pregnancy creates risk for fetus/birth defects including cleft palate

Dependence Potential

- Even at prescribed dose, *tolerance* can develop (more of drug is necessary to achieve same effect).
- Using sedative-hypnotics for extended periods, instead of exploring alternate means of coping can contribute to the development of *psychological dependence*
- Physical dependence can occur and patients may experience withdrawal symptoms if use is stopped abruptly.

Withdrawal

Withdrawal symptoms may include:

- Anxiety, irritability, frustration, anger, depression
- Nausea, diarrhea, constipation
- Abdominal cramps, increased heart rate
- Tremors or even seizures
- Severe withdrawal (when large doses used for extended periods) can result in depression, hallucinations, paranoia, convulsions and even death. Medical withdrawal should occur in a detoxification centre and/or hospital