

Patient Information Leaflet: Benzodiazepines for Fear of Flying

Following national recommendations it is now our Practice Policy to not prescribe benzodiazepines (eg. Diazepam, lorazepam) for use in patients who have a fear of flying. There are many reasons behind this change but below is a summary of what we feel are the most important reasons for you as patients to be aware of:

1) The use of any central nervous system depressant, otherwise known as CNS depressant, (eg. benzodiazepines such as diazepam) causes longer reaction times and slowed thinking, which during a flight will put the passenger at significant risk of not being able to act in a manner which could save their life in the event of a safety critical incident. On top of this there will be no-one else to do it for them - cabin crew are there to guide them and not do it for them. Incapacitation from these medications is therefore considered a risk to the lives of all onboard the aircraft in the event of an emergency requiring evacuation.

2) The use of any sort of CNS depressant has the potential to increase the risk of DVT (a blood clot in the leg which can be dangerous) - these drugs can induce non-REM sleep which tends to be of a type where the person does not move in their sleep, and therefore increases the possibility of sitting without moving for more than 4 hrs (the amount of time which has been shown to increase the risk of developing DVT whether in an airplane or elsewhere).

3) These medications are not supposed to be prescribed, and are actually contraindicated, in phobic states (as per the BNF – our national prescribing guidance)

4) NICE guidelines suggest that medication should not be used for mild and self limiting mental health disorders, and in more significant anxiety related states then benzodiazepines, sedating antihistamines or antipsychotics should not be prescribed. Benzodiazepines are only advised for the short term use for a crisis in generalised anxiety disorder, ie acute anxiety emergencies - if this is the case then patients would not be fit to fly anyway (potential risk to being able to allow completion of the flight without diversion) and fear of flying in isolation is not generalised anxiety disorder.

5) There are plenty of good quality fear of flying courses available in the UK which are easily accessible eg.

<https://www.fearlessflyer.easyjet.com/>

<https://www.flyingwithoutfear.com/>

<https://flyingwithconfidence.com/>

Thank you for your understanding.