



ILLEGAL BENZOS - reducing the harm



1-Blues

Illicit drugs sold as benzodiazepines (often referred to as "street benzos") have been found to contain some very harmful substances and **are increasingly reported to be causing hospitalisations and deaths locally**. These can come as things like Red Devils², Blues¹, Yellows³, Whites, Vallies, Scoobies, Diazepam, DAN 5620' (on one side) and '10' (on the other), 'T-20', 'TEM 20', 'Bensedin', 'MSJ' Etizolam, and jellies.

These often come in blister packs or pharmacy tubs to make them look like genuine medicines, but they are not.

Packaging, or markings on tablets and capsules, might say pills contain a certain dose of diazepam (often referred to as 'Valium') or alprazolam (often referred to as 'Xanax') but **they may not actually contain any of those substances at all**. Instead they may contain other high-potency benzodiazepines or their analogues, or **other dangerous substances not for medical use**.



2-Red Devils

Since the strength and ingredients of these tablets and capsules varies widely, **people who use "street benzos" cannot be sure how strong they are or what they are taking**.

Risk of overdose

Alcohol and some drugs **depress the central nervous system, which affects a person's breathing**. The drugs that do this include:

- o benzodiazepines
- o gabapentinoids (including pregabalin and gabapentin)
- o heroin and other opioids

NB – not all pills, tablets and capsules look like the pictures in this briefing. The same name can look completely different or be used for a completely different substance. These are just examples.

This means that **using any combination of these types of drugs with or without alcohol increases the risk of overdose and death**. This risk may be greater with high-potency benzodiazepines or their analogues.

Make sure you can recognise the symptoms of overdose. If you are with someone watch carefully for the signs of an overdose:

- drowsiness,
- shallow breathing,
- dizziness,
- poor balance,
- muscle weakness,
- fainting
- unconsciousness.

If someone overdoses:

- call 999 immediately for an ambulance
- give them any available naloxone if you think they have taken opioids and are competent to do so
- give immediate first aid basic life support (recovery position and monitor the airway, breathing and pulse)
- do not assume that a person who is still functioning normally will not worsen later – stay with them until the ambulance arrives

Naloxone



If you are also using heroin or methadone, **have naloxone close by at all times. Naloxone won't do much for the benzos in your system but by removing heroin or methadone, it might be enough to keep you alive.**

Risk to mental health

Very few people seem to know that Benzodiazepine use **can also negatively affect mental health and increase the risk of suicidal thoughts, particularly in people who are dependent upon alcohol or opiates.**

You can reduce the likelihood of this by not using combinations of depressant/ downer drugs

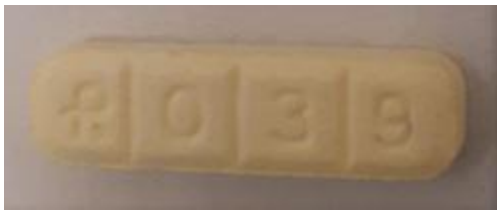
Dose and Risk

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The amount of tablets taken increases the risk. People often report consuming handfuls of tablets at a time. These drugs also affect short term memory so people can't remember their last dose. If people carry less on them at any given time this may help reduce the risk of unintentional re-dosing. Remember the dose and ingredients can vary from tablet to tablet.

Reduce the amount of tablets you are taking, try carrying less and start with a low dose.

Contents



3- Yellows

The content of street benzos varies. You can't tell by weight, size or colour what is in the tablet. In recent years many street benzos have been sold as valium (diazepam), however, testing has shown us that they contained no valium (diazepam) at all. What they did contain was Phenazepam, Flubromazolam, Clonazolam and Etizolam in differing amounts and quantities. All these drugs can differ in strength and how long they remain in the body.

Don't assume all tablets are what they say they are

Other risks

Memory loss and unpredictable behaviour is common when consuming large quantities of street benzos. People report losing days or coming round in a police cell only to be charged with an offence they do not remember committing, or have been the victim of rape and sexual assault.

Consuming alcohol with benzos may make these blackouts worse. **Do not use alcohol to help with jerking, seizures or withdrawals from benzos.**

Alcohol is a depressant and can increase the risk of overdose.

If you are blacking out take less and avoid alcohol.

Stopping use – sudden withdrawal can be life threatening

Tolerance and dependence to benzos develops very quickly. The more benzos you take, and the more often you take them, the greater the risk and the more dependant you will become. This can make stopping suddenly dangerous. You may need help to stop using safely. However, you can always cut down and seek help.

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If you have been taking large amounts most days then don't stop suddenly - but you can take less.

Harm Reduction Steps Summary

1. If you're going to use any drugs, make sure someone is around when you take them (if you overdose alone nobody can help you)
2. Don't assume all tablets are the same. Be extra cautious about the sources from which you get your drugs, and about the drugs you take, test the dose by starting with a small test dose (1/2 a pill) and waiting at least an hour before taking more
3. If taking heroin or methadone always have naloxone close by.
4. Reduce the amount of tablets you are taking, try carrying less and start with a low dose.
5. If you are blacking out, take less tablets and avoid alcohol.
6. If you have been taking large amounts most days then don't stop suddenly – get medical help from We Are With You 0333 200 0325 and webchat www.wearewithyou.org.uk

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