

USE OF BENZODIAZEPINES (AND RELATED MEDICATIONS) FOR FEAR OF FLYING

Prescribing sedatives for fear of flying used to be a common and popular method to ease anxiety for patients. In recent years it has increasingly been found to be unsuccessful as a treatment for phobias and have potential safety related side effects. We at Midway Surgery appreciate that some of our patients have previously been prescribed these medications for fear of flying and are hoping to highlight some of the reasons why we are signposting you to alternative ways to treat this phobia.

- Diazepam is a sedative, which means it makes you sleepy and more relaxed. If there is an emergency during the flight it may impair your ability to concentrate, following instructions and react to the situation. This could have serious safety consequences for you and those around you.
- Sedative drugs can make you fall asleep; however, when you do sleep it is an unnatural non-REM sleep. This means you won't move around as much as during natural sleep. This can cause you to be at increased risk of developing a blood clot (DVT) in the leg or even the lung. Blood clots are very dangerous and can even prove fatal. The risk is even greater if your flight is greater than 4 hours.
- A small number of people experience the opposite effect and may become agitated or aggressive. This could impact on your safety as well as that of other passengers and could also get you into trouble with the law.
- Diazepam and similar drugs are illegal in a number of countries. They may be confiscated, or you may find yourself in trouble with the police.
- Diazepam stays in your system for quite a while. If your job requires you to submit to random drug testing you may fail this having taken Diazepam.
- The prescribing authorities recognise that sedatives such as diazepam are not an effective way of treating phobias.

We appreciate that fear of flying is very real and very frightening. A much better approach is to tackle this properly with a Fear of Flying course run by the airlines:

Easy Jet – www.fearlessflyer.easyjet.com

British Airways – www.flyingwithconfidence.com

Virgin – www.flyingwithoutfear.co.uk

You can also self-refer to the Hertfordshire Partnership Foundation Trust's wellbeing Service for support with phobias and anxiety by calling [0300 777](tel:03007770707)

[0707](tel:0707) or www.hpft/nhs/uk/wellbeing-service.