

Reducing the risks:

If you are taking any of these medications, here are some ways to reduce the risks:

Do not drink alcohol before or after taking your medication:

WHY? Mixing alcohol with medications can slow your breathing and heart rate down to the point where you overdose - you might stop breathing and die. Separating your medication from any alcohol use will reduce this risk.

Don't mix prescription medications with other depressant medicines

WHY? Mixing two depressant medications (like benzos and opiates) together can be dangerous because you might accidentally overdose. Make sure you ask your doctor if your medications are safe to take together.

Tell all your health professionals what medicines you are taking.

WHY? To give you the best treatment, health professionals need all the information. They might not know all the medicines you are taking or the names of all the people who are looking after you. Because different medications can interact when mixed, it is important you tell all your health professionals what medications or drugs you are taking (including over-the-counter medicines, herbal medicines and illicit drugs).

Check with your doctor or pharmacist about how your medications could affect your driving

WHY? Some medications, including benzos and opiates, can affect your driving. Your doctor or pharmacist will be able to tell you whether you should avoid driving after taking your medications.

Ask for a medicine review

WHY? A medicine review is where a pharmacist reviews all your medicines, checks that they are safe to take together and makes sure you understand how and when to take them. Your doctor may refer you for a medication review under Medicare.

What can I do?

If you want more information or would like support to cut down on your opiate or benzodiazepine use, speak to your GP or call your local drug and alcohol service – they will be happy to help.

Who else can I call?

Directline (Victoria) ph: 1800 888 236 – advice, information and referrals for alcohol and other drug services in Victoria

Australian Drug Foundation ph: 1300 85 85 84 – advice, information and referrals for alcohol and other drug services across Australia

Pain Australia Helpline ph: 1300 340 357 – advice and information about chronic pain

Lifeline ph: 13 11 14 – support for mental health and suicide

Medicines Line ph: 1300 633 424 (1300 MEDICINE) – advice and information about prescription, over-the-counter and herbal medicines.

This resource was developed in partnership between:



A BITTER PILL:

resource brochure for help about prescription medications



- In 2012, 83% of fatal overdoses in Victoria involved prescription medications
- More people died from drug overdoses in 2012 than in the road toll
*(Coroner's Court of Victoria, 2014)

Did you know?

Medicines are designed to make you better – but can be addictive or dangerous if not taken properly. This brochure will help you to know what to look out for, how to stay safe and how to get support if you need it.



Benzodiazepines:

Benzodiazepines (or ‘benzos’) can be used to treat a number of conditions, including anxiety and alcohol withdrawal. They are addictive and work best when used short-term, for a period of 2-4 weeks up to 3 months. **Common Types:** Valium (diazepam), Xanax (alprazolam) and Serepax (oxazepam).

Opiates:

Opiates are medicines which can be used to manage moderate to severe pain or treat heroin dependence. Opiates are highly addictive, so it is important to follow your doctor’s advice when taking them.

Common Types: OxyContin and Endone (oxycodone), Panadeine (codeine) and Biodone or Methadone Syrup (methadone).

Benzodiazepines and opiates are both called ‘depressant drugs’ because they slow down or ‘depress’ the messages between your brain and your body (they don’t necessarily make you feel sad). Alcohol is also a depressant drug. These are addictive medications and need to be taken carefully as prescribed by your doctor. If not used appropriately, they can cause dependence, withdrawal, overdose or even death.

A note about other medications:

It’s important to speak to your doctor about any medication you are currently on, and if you plan to start or stop any medications. Some medications need to be taken daily and should not be stopped suddenly. Your doctor will be able to give you advice about the benefits of staying on some medications and develop a treatment plan with you. This way, you can be sure you’re getting the best information and treatment.

Am I using my medication safely?

Use this short quiz to see if your medicine use is safe:

Y	N	Have you:
		Been taking benzodiazepines regularly for more than 3 months
		Felt unable to cope without your pills
		Felt unwell, anxious, or had trouble sleeping when you have tried to cut down or stop taking the medication
		Felt like your current dose is no longer working as well as it used to
		Taken more pills than you were first prescribed
		Taken these medications if they haven’t been prescribed for you
		Increased your use of alcohol, drugs or other substances
		Noticed more problems in your life, such as conflict with family and friends, memory problems or difficulty concentrating
		Made sure you have another script before you run out of your current script
		Carried your pills with you ‘in case of an emergency’

If you answer yes to two or more of these statements, you might not be taking your medicine safely. Contact one of the services on the back of this pamphlet or speak to your doctor for more information.



Overdose

An overdose happens when you take too much of a medication, which can be harmful or cause death.

Signs of a drug overdose may include:

- nausea or feeling sick
- vomiting
- stomach cramps
- diarrhoea
- dizziness
- loss of balance
- seizures (fitting)
- drowsiness
- confusion
- difficulty breathing or not breathing
- snoring deeply
- turning blue
- coma or loss of consciousness

Overdose - what to do

If you think someone else has overdosed:

- Stay with the person and try to keep them calm
- If you think they are unconscious, try to wake them (e.g. call their name, tap their shoulder)
- If you can’t wake them up, lie them on their side (the ‘recovery position’) and call an ambulance on Triple Zero (000)
- Follow the advice of the ambulance operator on the phone. They will tell you how to look after the person.

If you think you have overdosed:

- Call an ambulance on Triple Zero (000) straight away
- If you can, tell the ambulance operator exactly what medications you have taken, and how much you took
- If you are with someone else, ask them to stay with you until the ambulance arrives
- Follow the advice of the ambulance operator on the phone.