

PHARMACY QI

Practical Tips for Quality Improvement

July 2019

What do healthcare providers need to consider when deprescribing benzodiazepine receptor agonists (BZRAs)?



CONSIDERATION	RATIONALE
Comorbidities	Identify and address any comorbidities that may contribute to insomnia before considering deprescribing (e.g., anxiety, depression, pain, respiratory disorder).
Involving the resident/caregiver	Discuss with resident/caregiver: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Risks of ongoing use of BZRA• Benefits of stopping the medication• Loss of therapeutic effect of BZRA in four weeks• Possibility of mild, short-term withdrawal effects during taper
Tapering schedule	Taper slowly. Reduce dose by about 25% every two weeks, then reduce by 12.5% every two weeks near the end of the taper.
Withdrawal	Mild, short-term withdrawal symptoms can appear once dose is reduced by 25%. These include insomnia, irritability, sweating, gastrointestinal symptoms, and anxiety.
Behavioural management/ cognitive behavioural therapy	Behavioural management and cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) can be provided during and after deprescribing of BZRA, should insomnia recur. Examples of behavioural management are: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Regular sleep and rising times encouraged• Increase daytime activity and reduce daytime naps• Warm milk or other decaffeinated drink taken at night• Toilet before bed
Monitoring	Monitor for withdrawal effects and benefits (such as increased alertness, reduction in falls) every one to two weeks during taper, and adjust tapering schedule if relapse occurs.

What if insomnia persists?

No medications for primary or chronic insomnia in older adults are proven to be safe or have long-term efficacy. If insomnia persists, consider behavioural management or CBT. Refer to the Benzodiazepine & Z-Drug (BZRA) Deprescribing Algorithm available on www.deprescribing.org for more information.

References:

1. Pottie K, Thompson W, Davies S, et al. Deprescribing benzodiazepine receptor agonists: evidence-based clinical practice guideline. *Can Fam Physician* 2018;64:339-351.
2. Benzodiazepine & Z-Drug (BZRA) Deprescribing Algorithm. https://deprescribing.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/deprescribing_algorithms2019_BZRA_vf-locked.pdf. Accessed April 9, 2019.