

The Muswell Hill Practice Policy on Benzodiazepines for Flight Anxiety

Benzodiazepines (such as diazepam) are a class of sedative medications that promote relaxation and drowsiness. These medications are commonly requested by patients seeking assistance with fear of flying or to aid sleep during flights.

The Muswell Hill Practice has made the decision to no longer prescribe benzodiazepines for the treatment of flight anxiety. This decision is based on our increased understanding of the safety concerns associated with these medications, as well as our commitment to adhering to the most up-to-date prescribing guidelines.

Prescribing Guidance

Doctors in the UK follow prescribing guidelines outlined in the British National Formulary (BNF). According to these guidelines, diazepam is contraindicated (i.e., not recommended) for the treatment of phobic states, which include fear of flying. The guidelines also state that the use of benzodiazepines to manage short-term mild anxiety is inappropriate. It is the responsibility of healthcare professionals to prescribe medications safely and in line with the most current evidence to avoid harm.

Reaction Times

Benzodiazepines can impair reaction times and slow cognitive function. In the unlikely event of an in-flight emergency, this may prevent you from reacting in a way that ensures your safety, as well as the safety of your fellow passengers.

Blood Clots

Although benzodiazepines may induce sleep, they cause the body to enter an unnatural sleep state (non-REM), which reduces normal movement during sleep. This can increase the risk of developing blood clots, particularly in the legs (deep vein thrombosis, or DVT) or lungs (pulmonary embolism). Blood clots can be fatal if they travel to the lungs. The risk of this complication is heightened during flights lasting over 4 hours.

Agitation

While most individuals feel relaxed when taking benzodiazepines, there is a small risk that some people may experience an adverse reaction, such as heightened agitation, aggression, or inappropriate behaviour. On a flight, such reactions could compromise your safety and that of other passengers.

Legal Considerations

Benzodiazepines are controlled substances in some countries and may be illegal to carry or use. In these places, your medication could be confiscated, and you might face legal trouble for having an illegal substance in your possession.

We hope this helps clarify the reasons behind our decision not to prescribe these medications for flight anxiety. We understand that fear of flying is a very real and distressing condition. According to Anxiety UK, around 10% of the population suffers from flight anxiety.

There are many resources available to help manage fear of flying, and several airlines offer courses for individuals with flight anxiety. You may find the following links useful:

- Ways to manage anxiety: <https://patient.info/news-and-features/how-to-manage-flight-anxiety>
- EasyJet: www.fearlessflyer.easyjet.com
- British Airways: www.flyingwithconfidence.com
- Virgin Atlantic: www.flyingwithoutfear.co.uk