

Dear Patients,

Clinicians at Mersea Island Medical Practice do not prescribe benzodiazepines (colloquially known as 'benzos' and include such drugs as diazepam) to patients for such conditions as 'fear of flying'.

Whilst we are sympathetic to these patients there are a multitude of reasons for not doing so:

1. The use of any sort of CNS depressant (of which benzos are a type) cause longer reaction times & slowed thinking, which during a flight will put the passenger at significant risk of not being able to act in a manner which could save their life in the event of a safety critical incident (& there will be no-one else to do it for them - cabin crew are there to guide them & not do it for them) - incapacitation from benzos is a risk to the lives of all onboard the aircraft in the event of an emergency requiring evacuation.
2. The use of any sort of CNS depressant has potential to increase the risk of DVT - these drugs can induce non-REM sleep which tends to be of a type where the person does not move in their sleep, and therefore increases the possibility of sitting without moving for more than 4 hrs (the amount of time which has been shown to increase the risk of developing DVT whether in an aeroplane or elsewhere).
3. The sedating effects of benzos have the possibility of causing some respiratory depression, resulting in a drop in blood oxygen levels. Normal oxygen levels for a healthy person at 8000ft are around 90%, so with the 2 effects added together, this may become significant.
4. A paradoxical increase in aggression may be reported by patients taking benzos & therefore has potential to put other occupants of the aircraft at risk.
5. Benzo use in combination with alcohol consumption causes an increase in the risk posed by many of the points above, & many (nervous) flyers will consume alcohol in the terminal before boarding & during their flight.
6. Benzos are contraindicated in phobic states.
7. It is illegal to import these drugs into some countries, e.g. the Middle East, and so the passenger will need to use a different strategy for the homeward bound journey and / or any subsequent legs of the journey.
8. Standard GP indemnity does not cover clinicians for treatment initiated outside the UK i.e. the return flight. Page 2 of 2
9. NICE guidelines suggest that medication should not be used for mild & self-limiting mental health disorders; in more significant anxiety related states - benzodiazepines, sedating antihistamines or antipsychotics should not be prescribed. Benzodiazepines are only advised for the short-term use for a crisis in generalised anxiety disorder, ie acute anxiety emergencies & if this were the case, a patient would not be fit to fly anyway & fear of flying in isolation is not generalised anxiety disorder.
10. The risk of addiction from inappropriate benzo use.

11. Possible risk of early dementia in benzo users (though currently it is unclear if this risk is in regular users only or includes occasional users).

12. There are plenty of good quality fear of flying courses available in the UK which are easily accessible by those who genuinely wish to fly & conquer their fear of flying, e.g.:

<https://fearlessflyer.easyjet.com/>

<http://www.flyingwithoutfear.com/>

<http://flyingwithconfidence.com/>

We hope this adequately clarifies our position.

Kind regards,

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Mersea Island Medical Practice