

SWANSEA DRUG NOTES NO. 3
VALIUM/DIAZEPAM
(Tranx)

VALIUM/DIAZEPAM

Diazepam is probably the most widely available prescribed drug on the street in Swansea. It is prescribed to people for anxiety and insomnia etc. It is also available on the black market. There is also an informal market, somewhere between the two, of people borrowing and lending supplies to each other.

WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Valium, which is the trade name of diazepam, is mainly available in tablets. The white is 2 mg, the yellow is 5 mg, and the blue is 10 mg. Other formulations exist but are rare. Valium is only one of a huge range of drugs – called benzodiazepines – that are very similar in effect.

USE

Always eaten. The drug does not dissolve easily in water and is therefore hardly ever injected (an injectable form is available for medical uses but rarely finds its way to the black market).

EFFECTS

The drug seems to reduce agitation and anxiety. People relax and become slightly sleepy ('a blurred fuzziness to the world'). Increased doses lead to drowsiness and sleep. The effects are similar to alcohol in that it causes disinhibition and lack of concentration. It can also cause short term memory loss. Difficulty with perception causes dangers driving etc.

It is not easy to kill yourself on Valium alone although overdoses may cause serious damage.

MIXING

Diazepam exacerbates the effects of many other drugs that affect mood. In particular with drugs like heroin, it can be dangerous. Effect with alcohol is also serious. Many heroin deaths are actually diazepam / heroin overdoses.

HOW LONG IT STAYS IN THE BODY

Diazepam is traceable in urine for 7 days after use.

LONG TERM EFFECTS

Tolerance develops and regular users will need to increase the dose to get the same effect. Regular use over a period of weeks will lead to a physical and psychological addiction. The withdrawal symptoms from tranquilliser abstinence will start with anxiety, tremors and panic attacks, increase to body muscular tension, insomnia, headache and cramps. In the most serious cases epileptic type seizures and delirium can occur.

RISKS AND HELP

The Law – Valium/diazepam is a Class C drug under the Misuse of Drugs Act (1971). It is illegal to supply them to anybody else - though not illegal to possess them. (It is illegal to possess the similar drug Temazepam without a prescription).

Accidents – Like alcohol all benzodiazepines increase confidence whilst reducing accuracy.

Mixing – Valium/diazepam is often used with other drugs, to increase the effects or minimise after effects. This causes more problems than if it is taken on its own. Accidents and overdose are all more likely in mixtures.

Overdose – When mixed with other drugs diazepam/Valium can cause serious problems.

Tolerance – Regular use will cause tolerance and increased doses will need to be taken to get the same effect.

Addiction – Regular use will lead to physical and psychological addiction. The psychological need to take the drug can be very strong indeed.

Anxiety attacks and Withdrawal fits – It is not unusual to find addicted people having panic attacks and even fits as part of the chaotic pattern of their dependence.

Memory – Short term memory loss will effect upon day to day organisation.

How to Help

No one should be withdrawn abruptly from these drugs without a careful discussion with their GP or health worker. It is essential that the patient actively agrees to the withdrawal, although ambivalence to a withdrawal regime is to be expected.

Persuading people that it is safe and possible for them to live without benzodiazepines may in itself take some time.

Tolerance to Valium can be such that people believe they need many times the usual dose to get an effect. High doses of Valium can actually increase problems.

Slowly and carefully, try to consider sources of anxiety and stress. Try to consider other relaxation techniques. Get person to use the drug in routine/planned way – not in response to sudden changes of mood. Work out reduction regime with the GP.

Some people seem able to withdraw with little difficulty – others have symptoms that continue for some months.

There are many excellent books to help people withdraw from these drugs. There are also tapes and exercise techniques available.

Swansea Drugs Notes

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