

## **Tablets for fear of flying: why we don't prescribe them anymore.**

We are sometimes asked to prescribe diazepam (or similar sedative drugs, such as lorazepam, temazepam or clonazepam) for fear of flying. Prescribing these drugs for this indication is not recommended anymore, and Chilwell Valley and Meadows Practice have recently agreed a practice policy that we will no longer prescribe these drugs for fear of flying. This policy decision has been made by the GP Partners and is adhered to by all prescribers working in the practice.

There are a number of very good reasons why prescribing drugs such as diazepam is not safe or recommended:-

1. As it is a sedative, there are concerns about reduced awareness and reaction times for patients taking Diazepam. Although plane emergencies are a rare occurrence this could pose a significant risk of not being able to concentrate, follow instructions and react in a manner which could save life in the event of an emergency on board.
2. The sedative effects of these drugs can affect breathing and cause low oxygen levels, which could be life threatening, especially with the lower circulating oxygen levels on an aeroplane, in people with breathing problems or when combined with alcohol.
3. Sedative drugs can make you fall asleep, however when you do sleep it is an unnatural deeper (non-REM) sleep. This means you won't move around as much as during natural sleep which increases the risk of getting a blood clot (DVT) in the leg or lung. Blood clots are very dangerous and can prove fatal. This risk is greater if your flight is longer than four hours.
4. Diazepam in the UK is a controlled drug. It is in a class of drugs called 'benzodiazepines'. The prescribing guidelines doctors have to follow say that use of these drugs to treat short-term 'mild' anxiety or 'phobia' is inappropriate. Our doctor would be taking a significant legal risk by prescribing against these guidelines. They are only licenced to be used short term for a 'crisis in generalised anxiety'. But if you are having such a crisis you are not likely to be fit to fly. Fear of flying in isolation is not a generalised anxiety disorder
5. There is evidence use of these drugs stops the normal adjustment response that would gradually lessen anxiety over time and may perpetuate and increase anxiety in the long term, especially if used repeatedly.
6. Whilst the majority of people find diazepam and similar drugs sedating, some people have a paradoxical reaction of agitation, aggression and confusion after taking them. They can cause disinhibition and lead you to behave in a way that you would not normally, which can pose a risk on the plane to your safety and that of other passengers. A similar effect can be seen with alcohol, which has led to people being removed from flights.
7. Diazepam and similar controlled drugs are illegal in some countries. They may be confiscated, or you may find yourself in trouble with the police.
8. Diazepam stays in your system for some time. If your job or sport requires you to take random drug testing, you may fail this having taken diazepam.

9. It is important to tell your travel insurer about your medical conditions and medications you take. If not, there is a risk of your insurer nullifying any insurance policy you may have.

We appreciate that fear of flying is very real and frightening. We recommend tackling this properly with a 'Fear of Flying' Course run by many airlines and we have listed a number of these below.

Easy Jet [www.fearlessflyer.easyjet.com](http://www.fearlessflyer.easyjet.com) Tel 0203 8131644

British Airways [www.flyingwithconfidence.com](http://www.flyingwithconfidence.com) Tel 01252 793250

Virgin [www.flyingwithoutfear.co.uk](http://www.flyingwithoutfear.co.uk) Tel 01423 714900