

Hanham Health Benzodiazepines for fear of flying Policy

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1.0	25/07/2024	Dr Jenny Lockey	JL	

Hanham Surgery does NOT prescribe sedatives 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. The reasons for this are explained below:

- Benzodiazepines e.g. diazepam/lorazepam are sedative, there are concerns about reduced awareness and reaction times for patients taking these medications. 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.
- Passenger cabins of commercial aeroplanes are usually pressurised to the same atmospheric conditions found at an altitude of 10,000 feet. As such, the effective oxygen level is only 14.3% compared to the 20.9% found at ground level. The sedative effects of these drugs can affect breathing and cause lower blood oxygen levels. The combination of this could cause serious illness or be life threatening in people with pre-existing breathing problems or when combined with alcohol.
- 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.
- Benzodiazepines are considered controlled drugs in the UK. The prescribing guidelines doctors must follow says that use of these drugs to treat short-term 'mild' anxiety or 'phobia' is inappropriate. A doctor would be taking a significant legal and prescribing risk by prescribing outside of these guidelines. These medications are 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.

- Whilst most 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 the safety of other passengers. A similar effect can be seen with alcohol, which has led to people being removed from flights.
- Diazepam and similar controlled drugs are illegal in some countries. They may be confiscated, or you may find yourself in trouble with the police.
- 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.
- 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 a fear of flying is very real and very frightening and can be debilitating. However, there are much better and effective ways of tackling the problem. This includes a Fear of Flying Course, which are run by several airlines.

Listed below are links to some of the national programmes for anyone who would like additional support with fear of flying.

Easy Jet

[Easy Jet Fearless Flyer](#)

Tel 0203 8131644

British Airways

[Flying with Confidence](#)

Tel 01252 793250

Virgin

[How to cope with a fear of flying | Virgin](#)

Tel: 01423 714900