

FAMILY, FRIENDS & CAREGIVERS: PROVIDING SUPPORT FOR SOMEONE IN BENZODIAZEPINE WITHDRAWAL

If you are supporting someone experiencing withdrawal syndrome due to discontinuing a benzodiazepine (BZ) (and/or other psychotropic drugs) you may find that the usual approaches are not effective. Withdrawal can cause bizarre behaviour and uncommon physical and psychological reactions. This can be overwhelming and so you may be feeling unsure about how to proceed.

The most important thing you can do is be there, be available, and almost constantly give encouragement. Be gentle. Comfort the person withdrawing in verbal and non-verbal ways: a warm non-caffeine drink, holding their hand or offering a gentle touch of reassurance, if appropriate. Validate their experience and emotions and let them know that it is okay to cry, be angry, or to even be silent if they need to.

We ask you to withhold judgement and to try to be as patient as possible. A problematic withdrawal can take everyone involved into a what may seem to be a whirlwind of drama, uncharacteristic behaviour, financial difficulties, relationship friction and more. Rest assured that all of this is temporary, withdrawal-induced, and will go with recovery in time.

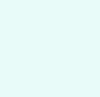
If the withdrawal sufferer is up for visitors, it is a good idea to let them know how much time you are able to spend: "We can talk for an hour or so, but then I need to go to the supermarket and later pick up the children from school". This will allow time for your friend or relative to relax, knowing that you are available for that time and that they won't be a 'burden' to you. (This is often an issue of concern that BZ withdrawal sufferers feel) It will also allow for you, as the friend, family member, or caregiver, to have some time away from the BZ sufferer in order to avoid your own burnout.

Below are a list of 'DOs' and 'DON'Ts' to consider when supporting someone experiencing BZ withdrawal. By giving adequate and appropriate support you are making a valuable positive difference to someone's withdrawal experience. Your contribution can be one of the most important factors in determining how well they cope.

DO:

-  Learn as much as you can about withdrawal
-  Be there for them.
-  Reassure them that withdrawal is temporary & that they will recover, as often as is required (which may be constantly).
-  Listen without judgement.
-  Respect their decision if they prefer not to discuss withdrawal.
-  Offer support in practical ways (shopping, cleaning, babysitting, driving, etc.)
-  Encourage them to be gentle with themselves, as they will need time.
-  Encourage others to be patient with them.

DON'T:

-  Suggest they 'snap out of it' or 'pull themselves together'
-  Suggest that something other than withdrawal is taking place.
-  Pressure them to do what you think they need to do (reinstating their medication, increasing activities, going back to work, etc.) even if you think what you are suggesting is best
-  Tell them to stop crying/raging/feeling whatever they are feeling or tell them to 'cheer up'
-  Tell them other people are worse off or that they are 'lucky' it is not worse.
-  Ignore their distress or pretend the withdrawal is not happening.
-  Ask them lots of questions about other possible medical conditions or try to diagnose them with having other things.

Source (adapted from): recovery-road.org/dos-and-donts

Please Learn More:

- benzo.org.uk
- *The Ashton Manual*: benzo.org.uk/manual
- benzoinfo.com
- w-bad.org

