

Benzodiazepine Tapering Strategies

Tapering benzodiazepines can be a challenging endeavor, particularly for patients who have been taking a benzodiazepine (BZD) for a long period of time (i.e., years). There are many tapering schedules and strategies available for providers to utilize when considering reducing the benzodiazepine dose a patient is taking. Working with the patient throughout the tapering process is key, as is adjusting the tapering schedule based on the patient's tolerance of the dose reduction and any withdrawal symptoms they experience. A few tapering strategies to consider are listed below.

Strategy 1

Reduce total benzodiazepine dose by 25% every 1-2 weeks, 12.5% reduction near end (+/- planned drug-free days)

- If dose does not allow for 25% reduction, consider using 50% reduction with drug-free days (or use EMPOWER Tapering Schedule)
- For **QHS dosing**: consider 25% reduction every week
- For **daytime dosing (QD to QID)**: consider 10-25% total dose reduction every 1-2 weeks
- If symptoms relapse or patient is experiencing withdrawal symptoms, maintain current dose for 1-2 weeks, then continue to taper at a slower rate

Strategy 2

Use the benzodiazepine tapering schedule from the **EMPOWER study** brochure¹

WEEKS	TAPERING SCHEDULE							✓
	MO	TU	WE	TH	FR	SA	SU	
1 and 2	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
3 and 4	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
5 and 6	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
7 and 8	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
9 and 10	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
11 and 12	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
13 and 14	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
15 and 16	×	●	×	×	●	×	●	✓
17 and 18	×	×	×	×	×	×	×	

EXPLANATIONS

Full dose
 Half dose
 Quarter of a dose
 No dose

Strategy 3

Switch to a longer-acting BZD before initiating taper (e.g., clonazepam, chlorthalidone, or diazepam)²

- Calculate the equivalent dose of the longer-acting BZD by using the Benzodiazepine Equivalency Table
 - Reduce calculated dose of the longer-acting BZD by 25-50%, maintain patient on this dose for 1-2 weeks before continuing taper
 - Continue taper of longer-acting BZD as above
- *This tapering strategy can be useful in cases of long-term use, high doses, or short half-life BZDs (e.g., alprazolam); may help reduce withdrawal symptoms during taper.*
- *Reducing the dose of a shorter-acting BZD before converting to a longer-acting BZD may be considered for your older patients due to the possibility of decreased metabolism*
- **Caution:** *Converting to a longer-acting BZD is not recommended for patients with marked liver impairment since these BZDs have active metabolites, extending their effective half-life*
- *For sample tapering schedules, see: <https://www.benzo.org.uk/manual/bzsched.htm> (The Ashton Manual, Ch 2.)*

Benzodiazepine Tapering Best Practices

- Keep in mind what tablet strengths are available when calculating new doses
- The longer the duration of BZD therapy, the longer the taper may take
- The second half of taper should take longer than the first half
- Doses should be scheduled instead of ‘as needed’ during the taper
- If patient experiences withdrawal or rebound symptoms, you may slow or pause the taper (do not reverse the taper or increase BZD doses, the process must be unidirectional)

BENZODIAZEPINE EQUIVALENCY TABLE

	NAME Generic (available Brand)	Approx. Dose Equivalent to 10 mg Diazepam	Available Tablet Strengths
Short-Acting	Alprazolam (Xanax)	0.5-1 mg	0.25 mg, 0.5 mg, 1 mg, 2 mg, (3 mg ER)
	Oxazepam	15-30 mg	10 mg, 15 mg, 30 mg
	Triazolam (Halcion)	0.5 mg	0.125 mg, 0.25 mg
	Temazepam (Restoril)	20-30 mg	7.5 mg, 15 mg, 22.5 mg, 30 mg
Intermediate	Estazolam	2 mg	1 mg, 2 mg
	Lorazepam (Ativan)	1-2 mg	0.5 mg, 1 mg, 2 mg
Long-Acting	Chlordiazepoxide	25 mg	5 mg, 10 mg, 25 mg
	Clonazepam (Klonopin)	0.5 mg	(0.125 mg, 0.25 mg ODT), 0.5 mg, 1 mg, 2 mg
	Quazepam (Doral)	15 mg	15 mg
Very Long-Acting	Clobazam (Onfi, Sympazan)	20 mg	10 mg, 20 mg
	Clorazepate (Tranxene-T)	15 mg	3.75 mg, 7.5 mg, 15 mg
	Diazepam (Valium)	10 mg	2 mg, 5 mg, 10 mg
	Flurazepam	15-30 mg	15 mg, 30 mg

References and Additional Resources

¹EMPOWER Trial Brochure. *You May Be at Risk*. Available at: <http://www.criugm.qc.ca/fichier/pdf/BENZOeng.pdf>

² PL Detail-Document, Benzodiazepine Toolbox. Pharmacist’s Letter/Prescriber’s Letter. August 2014. *Benzodiazepine Toolbox*, pp. 14-15

³Deprescribing.org. *Benzodiazepine & Z-Drug (BZRA) Deprescribing Algorithm*. May 2018. Available at: <http://52.207.93.195/wp-content/uploads/deprescribing-algorithm-benzodiazepines.pdf>

⁴Oregon Pain Guidance. Opioid and Benzodiazepine Tapering Flow Sheets. Available at:

<https://www.oregonpainguidance.org/app/content/uploads/2016/05/Opioid-and-Benzodiazepine-Tapering-flow-sheets.pdf>