



ASAM REVIEW COURSE 2025

# Sedative Use Disorder: Research and Practice

Ricardo Restrepo, MD, MPH

Substance Abuse Treatment Program-  
SATP/Buprenorphine Clinic Medical Director

Health Science Clinical Professor at University of  
California, Riverside

Associate Clinical Professor at Charles Drew University,  
Los Angeles

Department of Psychiatry and Human Behavior





# Financial Disclosure

Ricardo Restrepo, MD, MPH

- No relevant disclosures

# Outline

1. Historical View
2. Neurobiology
3. Epidemiology
4. Risk and Benefits of Benzodiazepines
5. Phases of Sedative-Hypnotic Treatment and related Syndromes
6. Selective nonbenzodiazepine hypnotic agents
7. Barbiturates
8. GHB
9. Conclusions



The JOINT  
CLINICAL PRACTICE GUIDELINE ON

# **Benzodiazepine Tapering:**

Considerations when Benzodiazepine  
Risks Outweigh Benefits

## ASAM Clinical Practice Guideline on Alcohol Withdrawal Management 2025

March 2025

# Historical View

- First half of XX century Barbiturates (starting with Barbital)
- 1950 Meprobamate
- 1950s Benzodiazepine were introduced as substitute for barbiturates (starting with Chlordiazepoxide)
- 1960s Benzodiazepines widely available and prescribed
- 1970s Benzodiazepines became the most commonly prescribed of all medications around the world

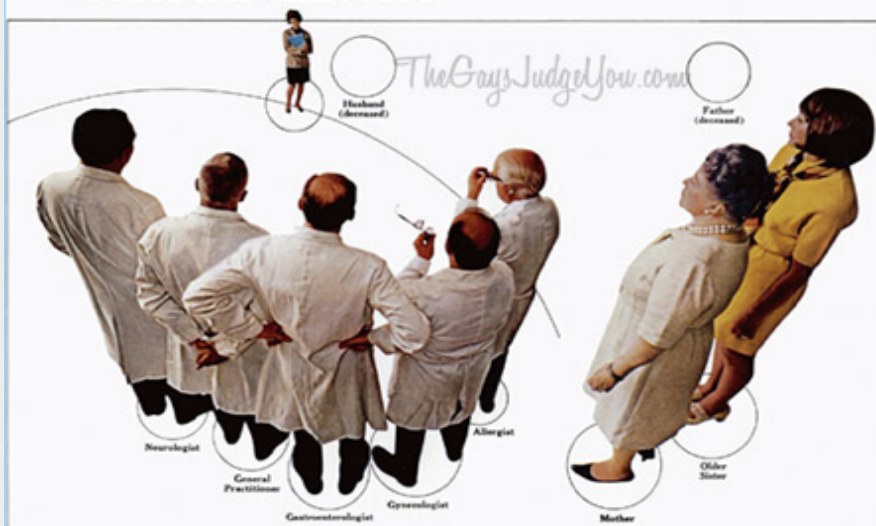
# Historical View

- 1980s Identification of medication losing efficacy over time and became associated with adverse effects
- 1990s Short acting benzodiazepines
- 2000s (drug tolerance and withdrawal) Not sufficient for dependence and nonbenzodiazepine hypnotic agents; elderly population risks
- 2014-present DSM 5 (sedative use disorder); guidelines adopted regarding use

# Types of Sedatives

- BZ- receptor agonist (BZRA)
  - Benzodiazepines
  - Selective non-benzodiazepine hypnotics (Z-drugs)
- Barbiturates
- Others: GHB and Paraldehyde, chloral hydrate, meprobomate

# Her world orbits around doctors. Psychic tension rules her universe.



This childless widow's interpersonal relationships, sociometrically diagrammed, reveal the patterns of dominance, closeness, absence, and loss created by the principal people in her life.

Her mother's obvious preference for her older sister has always rankled this patient. The deaths of her father as husband accentuated her alienation and hostility. Hypochondriasis is the way she disowns her conflicts.

While you gradually turn her away from somatic concerns and guide her through old, hidden problem areas you can ease her undue psychic tension with Valium® (diazepam).

Valium 10-mg tablets *q.i.d.* can help most psychoneurotic patients undergoing severe psychic tension and apprehension with or without associated depressive symptoms. The fourth tablet taken at bedtime, can combat anxiety-induced sleeplessness. For less severe tension states, Valium 5-mg tablets *t.i.d.* or *q.i.d.* may be adequate. Drowsiness, fatigue and ataxia are the most commonly reported side effects. Tailor the dosage to the individual—a procedure facilitated by the three convenient tablet strengths.

For hypochondriacs—and many other types of psychoneurotic patients walled in by situational stress—Valium by relieving psychic tension, may prove itself a useful adjunct to your healing skills.

Please see last page of this advertisement for prescribing information.

**Valium®**  
(diazepam)  
2-mg, 5-mg, 10-mg tablets

ROCHE  
Roche Laboratories  
Division of Hoffmann-La Roche Inc.  
Nutley, N.J. 07110

Syndromes of the 1960s

## The battered parent syndrome



She's the paradox of our age. Compared to her mother, she has more education, more usable income and more labor-saving devices. Yet she is physically and emotionally overworked, overwrought and—by the time you see her—probably overwhelmed.

What went wrong? Is parenthood something other than the rosy fulfillment pictured by the women's magazines? Is anxiety and tension fast becoming the occupational disease of the homemaker?

Some say it's unrealistic to educate a woman and then expect her to be content with the Cub Scouts as an intellectual outlet.

Or to grant that she is socially, politically and culturally equal, while continuing to demand domestic and biological subservience.

Or to expect her to shoulder the guilt burden of this child-centered age without unraveling around the emotional edges.

Or to compete with her husband's job for his time and involvement.

But whatever the cause, the consequences—anxiety, tension, insomnia, functional disorders—fill waiting rooms.

Sometimes it helps to add 'Miltown' to her treatment—to help her relax both emotional and muscular tension. It's no substitute for a week in Bermuda, or for emotional readjustment. But it will often make the latter easier for her, as well as for the physician.

And 'Miltown' has been doing just that—for a dozen years now—with substantial success.

**Indications:** Effective in relief of anxiety and tension states; adjunctively when anxiety may be a causative or disturbing factor. Fosters normal sleep through anti-anxiety and muscle-relaxant properties.

**Contraindications:** Previous allergic or idiosyncratic reactions to meproamate. (Brief summary of prescribing information is continued on next page.)

Wallace Pharmaceuticals/Cranbury, N.J.



**MILTOWN®**  
(MEPROBAMATE)

when reassurance is not enough

## Women dominate his universe psychic tension can rule his life

He doesn't understand the source of his psychic tension. But you do. He relates well to women with domineering traits. But not to men. Not even his own son.

Whenever psychic tension is a significant component in the clinical profile, consider the use of Valium (diazepam). On proper maintenance dosage, Valium can help reduce the psychoneurotic patient's tension—anxiety, apprehension, agitation, alone or with depressive symptoms—to more comfortable and adaptable levels. The most commonly reported side effects are drowsiness, fatigue and ataxia.

For your passive-dependent, tension-ridden patient dominated by women—and for countless other psychoneurotics—Valium may prove itself a helpful partner to your psychotherapeutic skills.

Please see last page of this advertisement for prescribing information.

for the relief of psychic tension  
in psychoneurotic states  
**Valium®**  
(diazepam)  
2-mg, 5-mg, 10-mg tablets  
*t.i.d. and h.s.*



The central figure's interpersonal relationships, sociometrically diagrammed, reveal the patterns of dominance and closeness he has with the principal people in his life. In this individual, domination by women has led to psychic tension.

## Case: RR

A year later, Mr. RR, now 59-year-old Latino male with a past history of ETOH use disorder, anxiety, insomnia, and past medical history of HTN, GERD, and pancreatitis, arrives in the emergency department with a friend for **confusion and diaphoresis**.

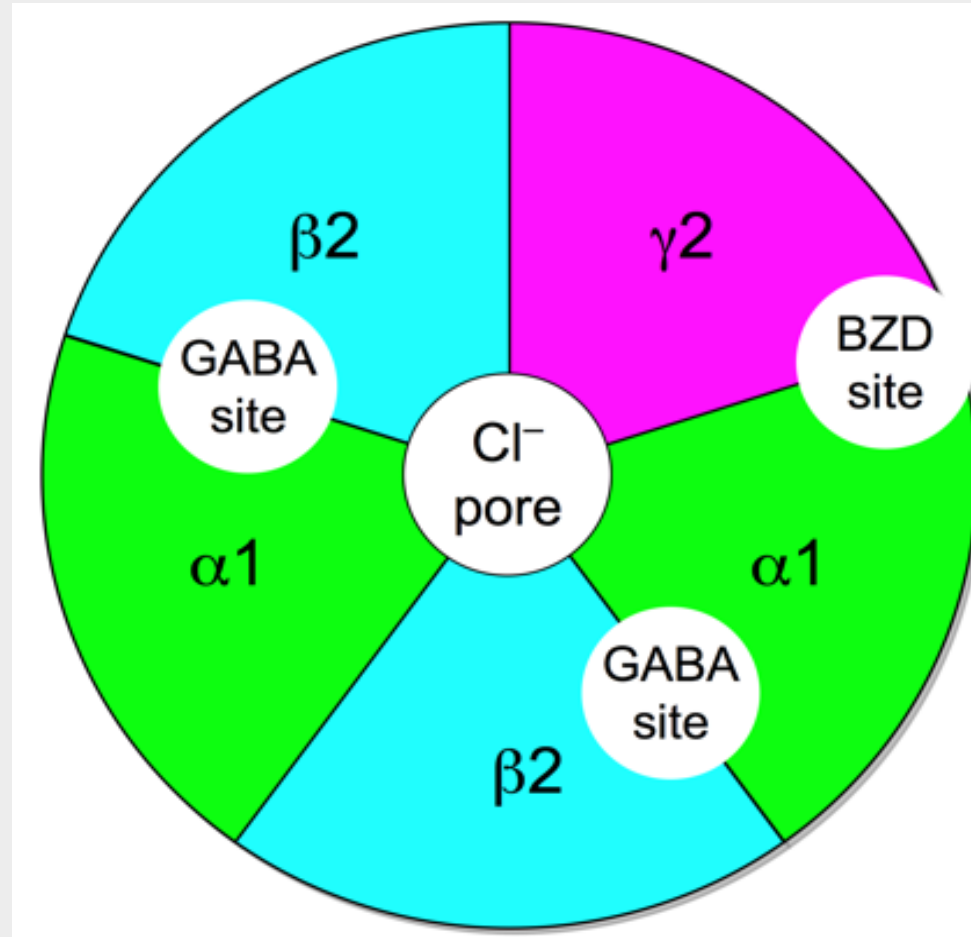


# Neurobiology (GABAA Receptor)

- GABA - the primary inhibitory neurotransmitter system in the CNS
- Transmembrane pentamer composed of:

$2\alpha$  ,  $2\beta$   
 $1\gamma$

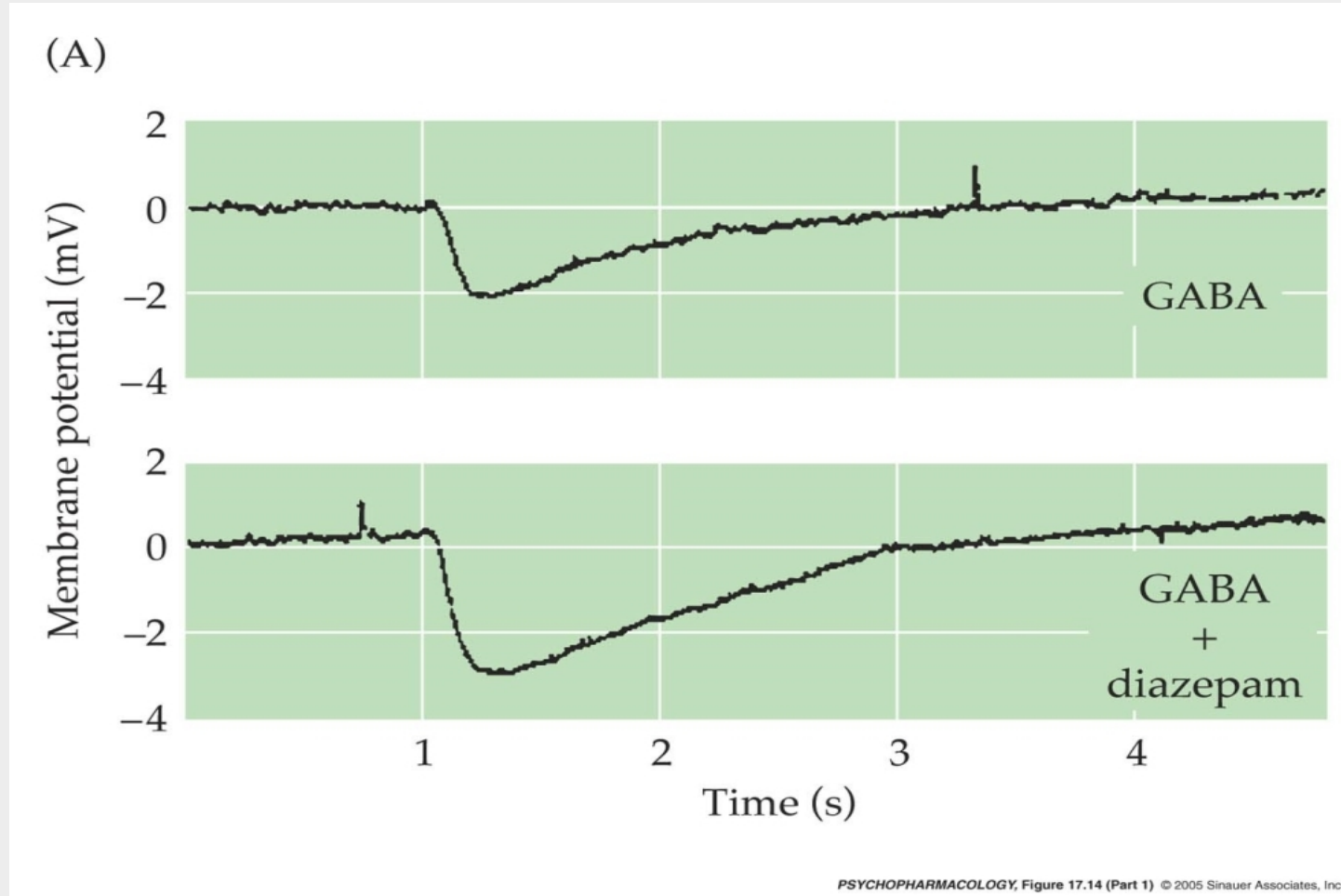
# Neurobiology (GABAA Receptor)



# Neurobiology (GABAA Receptor)

- GABA is estimated to be present in 40% of all synapses in the human brain
- It is an inhibitory neurotransmitter, opposed to excitatory neurotransmitters such as glutamate.
- It reduces the excitability of the post synaptic side of the synapse
- 2 types : GABAA ionotropic (prominent target for drugs) and GABA B metabotropic
- BZDs increase the number of time the Cl<sup>-</sup> channel opens (frequency)
- BBTs increase the duration of the opening of the Cl<sup>-</sup>channel

# Effects of GABA and diazepam (benzodiazepine) on membrane potentials and chloride flux

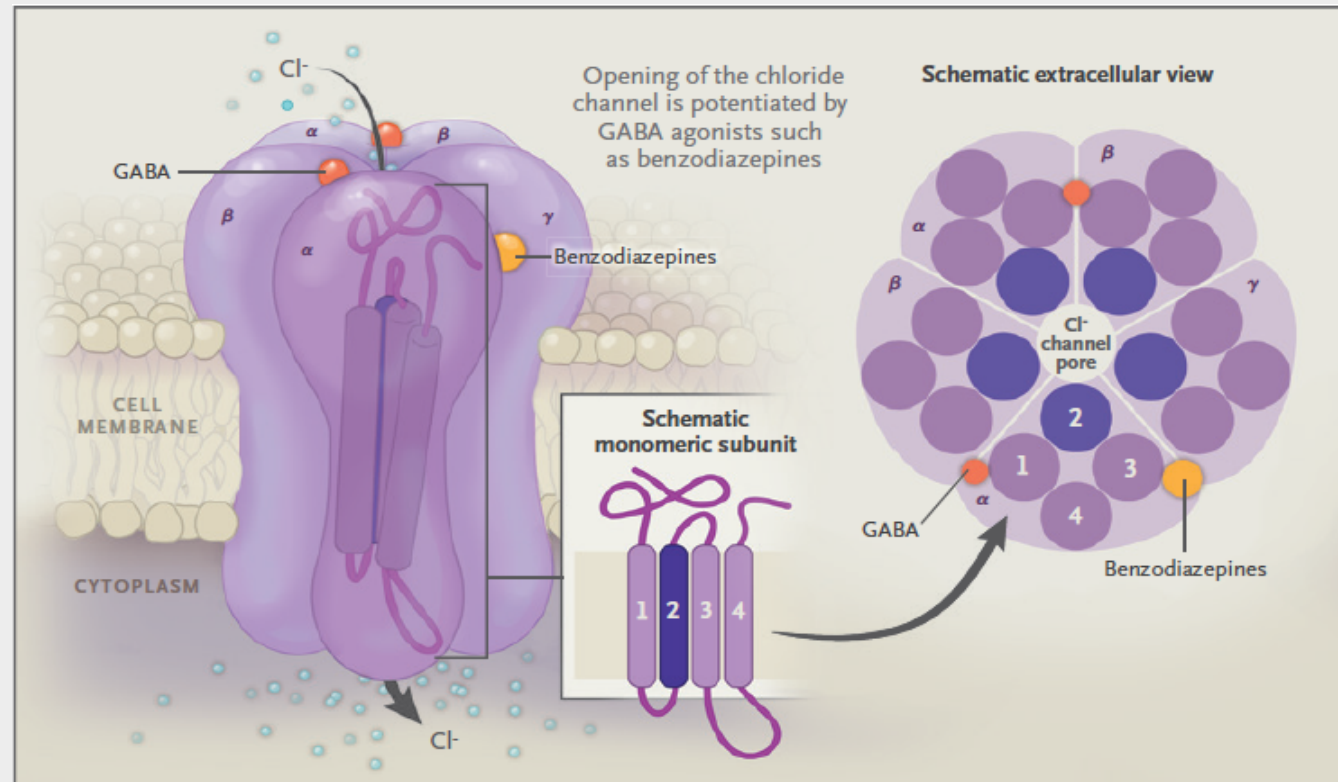


# Neurobiology (GABAA Receptor)

Benzodiazepines require the presence of GABA

Barbiturates do not require the presence of GABA

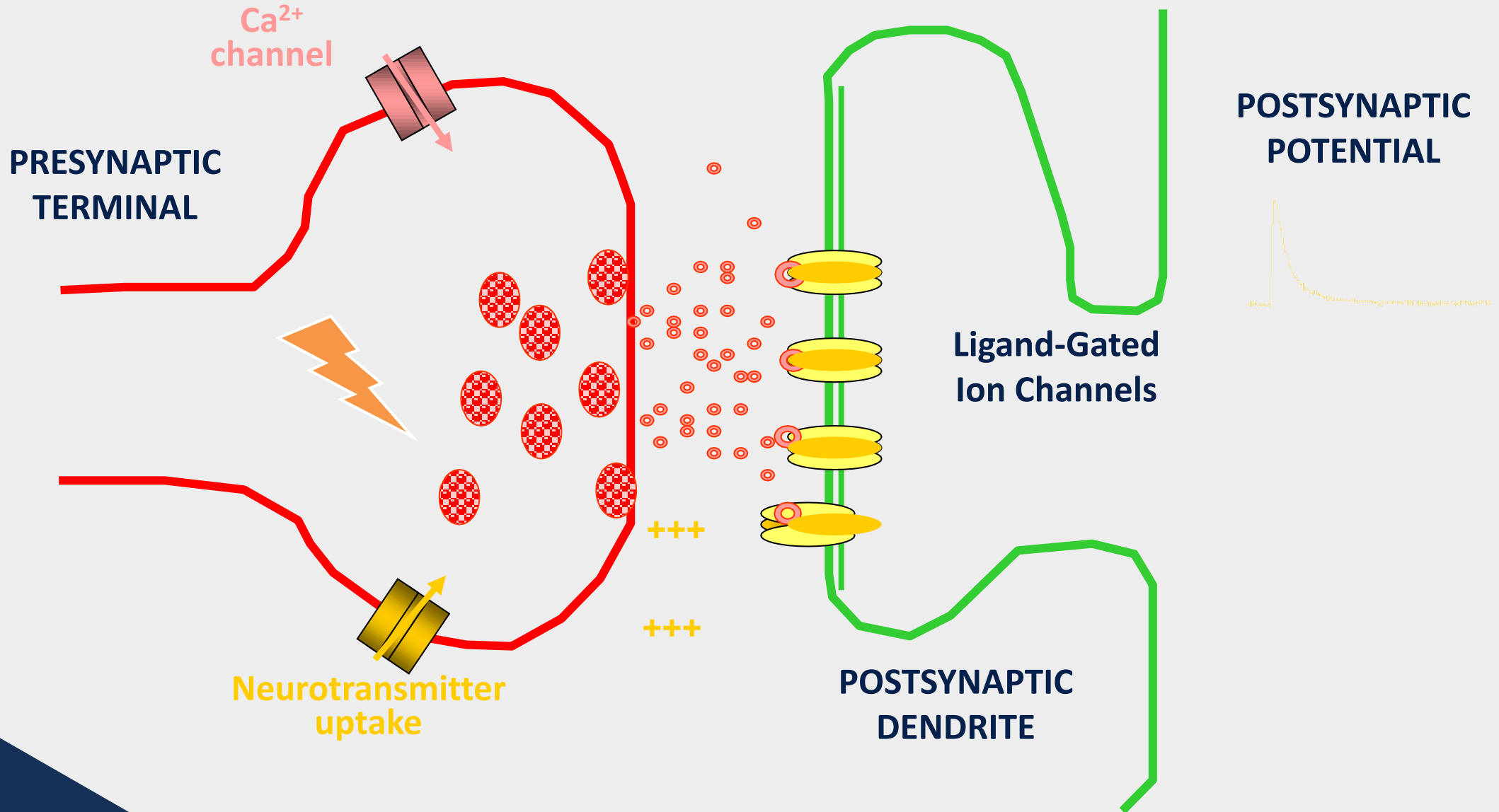
Flumazenil blocks effects of benzodiazepine and zolpidem but not Barbiturates



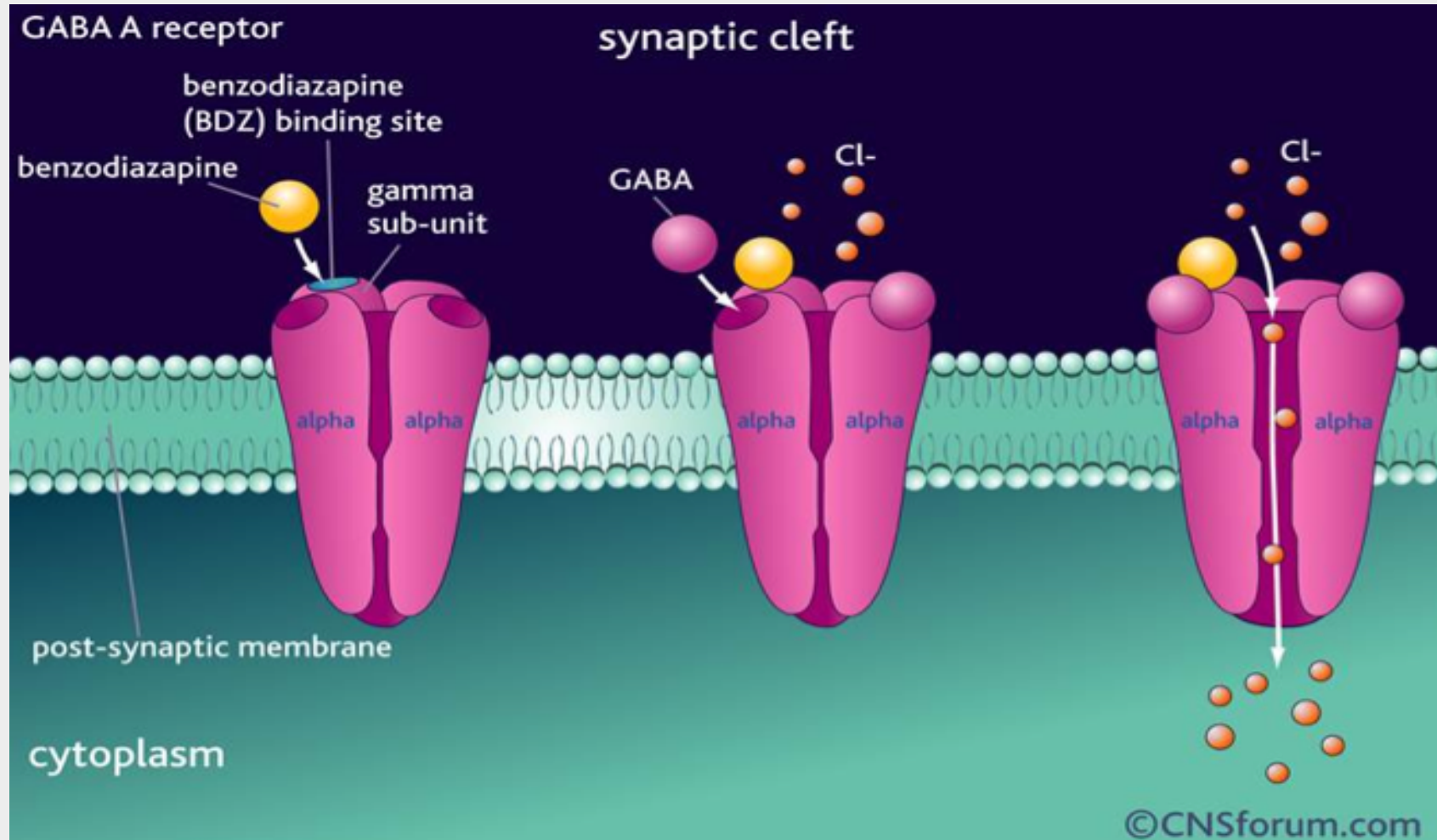
# Neurobiology (GABAA Receptor)

- **Benzodiazepines**
  - Bind a cleft of  $\alpha$  and  $\gamma$  subunits
  - Increase the affinity of the receptor for GABA (frequency) :  
Chloride channel opening
  - BZD needs GABA
- **Barbiturates (propofol):**
  - Bind  $\alpha$  subunit
  - Increase duration of channel opening
  - BBT does need GABA

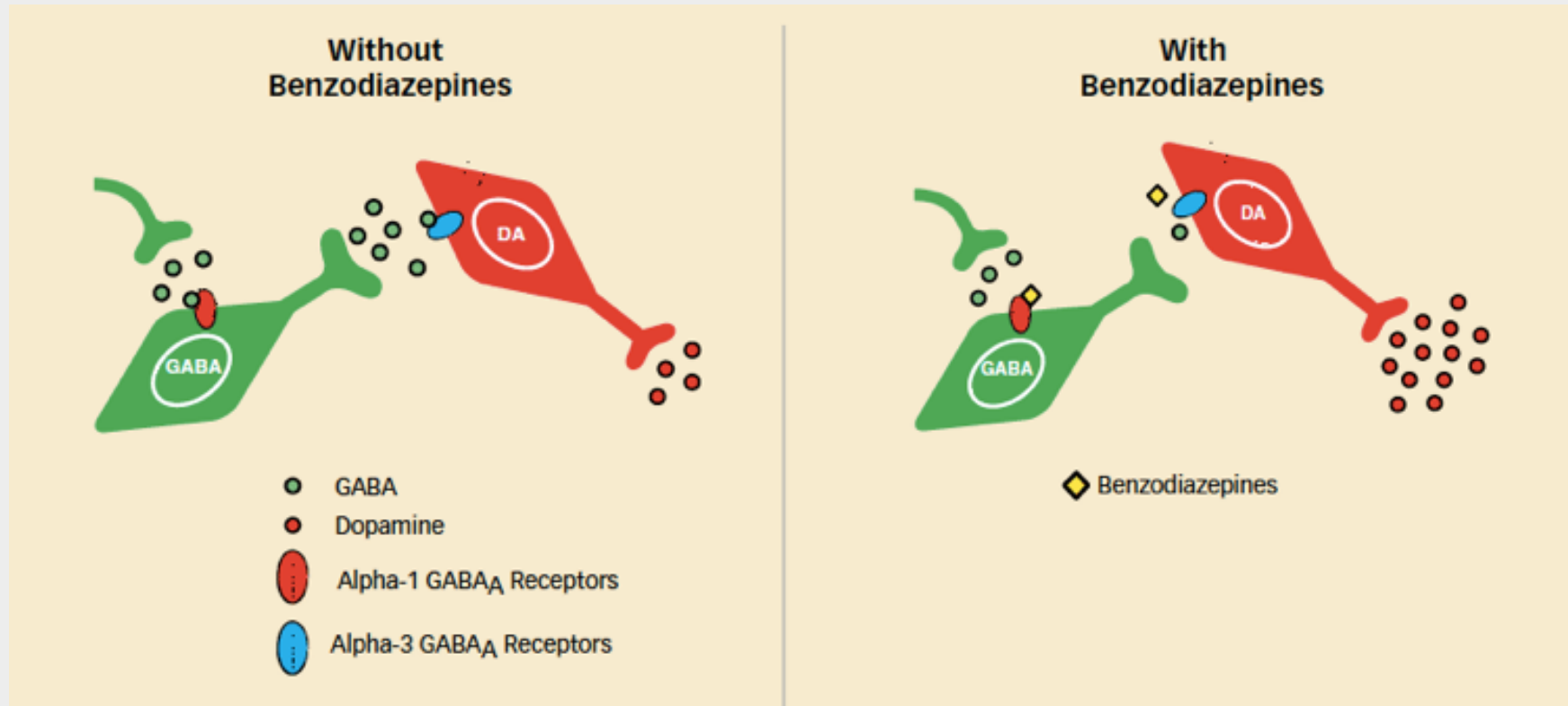
# Steps in Synaptic Transmission



# Neurobiology (GABA<sub>A</sub> Receptor)



# Mechanism of Benzodiazepine Addiction (hypothesis)



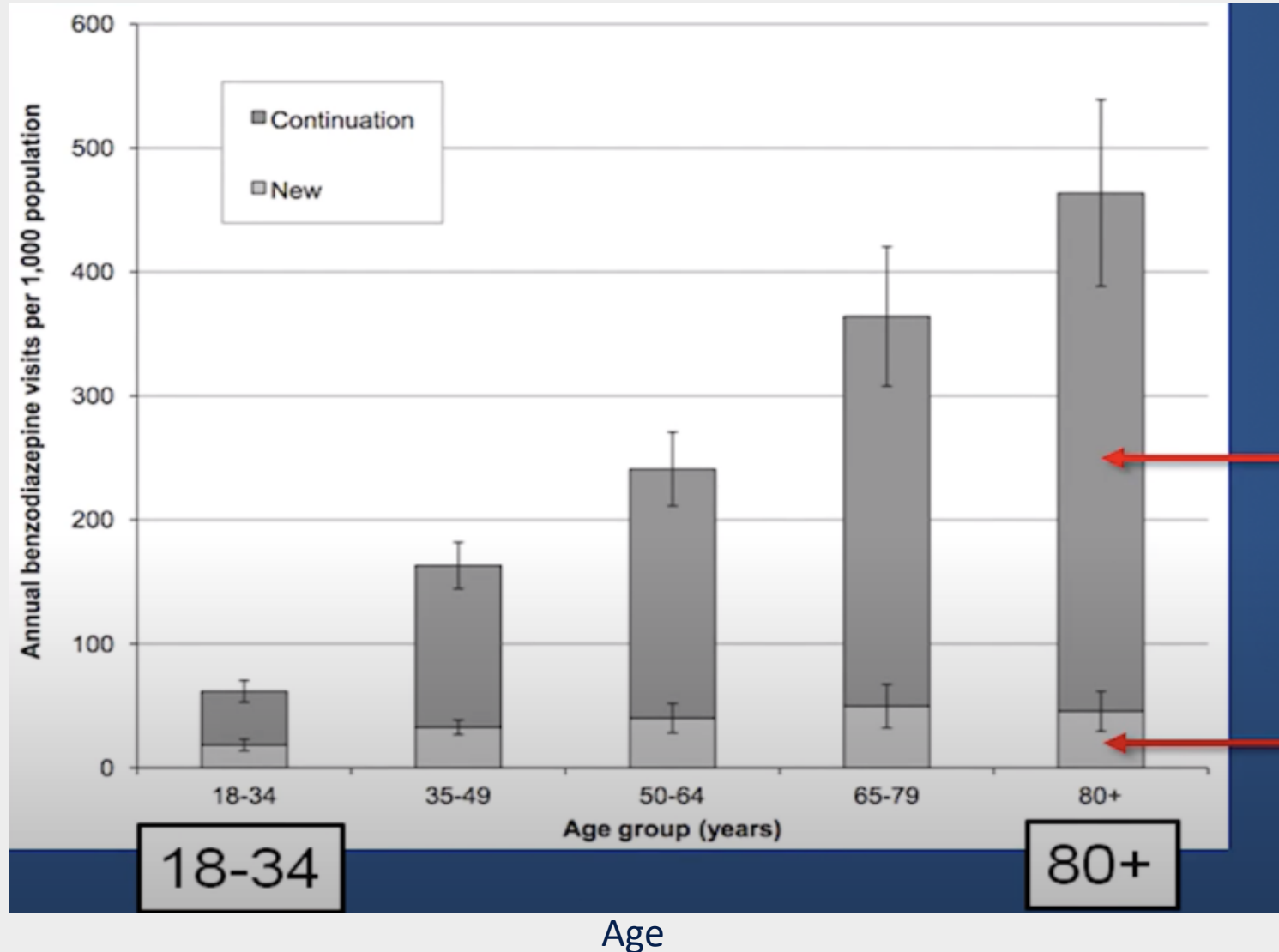
# Epidemiology

- 80% of pts with benzo use disorder use other drugs
- 30-50% of pts with ETOH use disorders in detox and 44% of IV drug user also use BZD
- Average benzodiazepine use is about 2 :: 1
- Approximately 5.2 % of adults in U.S use benzos
- Use of benzodiazepines increases with age
- In the US, roughly 9 of 10 older adults who use benzodiazepines on a long-term basis are prescribed by PCP



# Epidemiology

Use of Benzodiazepine accumulates with age



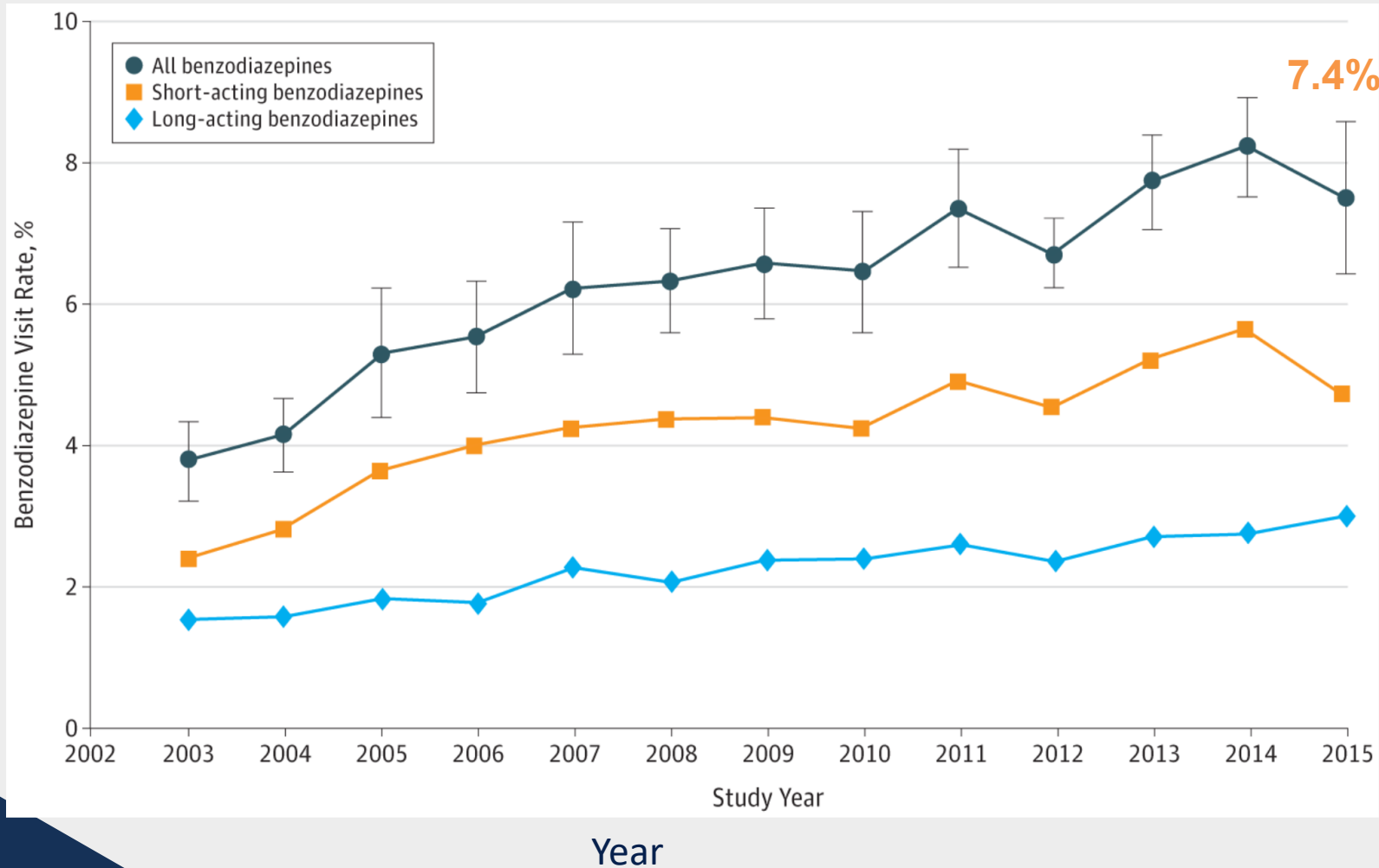
Annual BZD  
visits per  
1,000  
population

Continuation

New

# Epidemiology

## Benzodiazepine Visit Rate in United States



95% increase in  
BZD-related visits in  
12 years

Benzo visit  
Rate %

# Concurrent use of other Substances

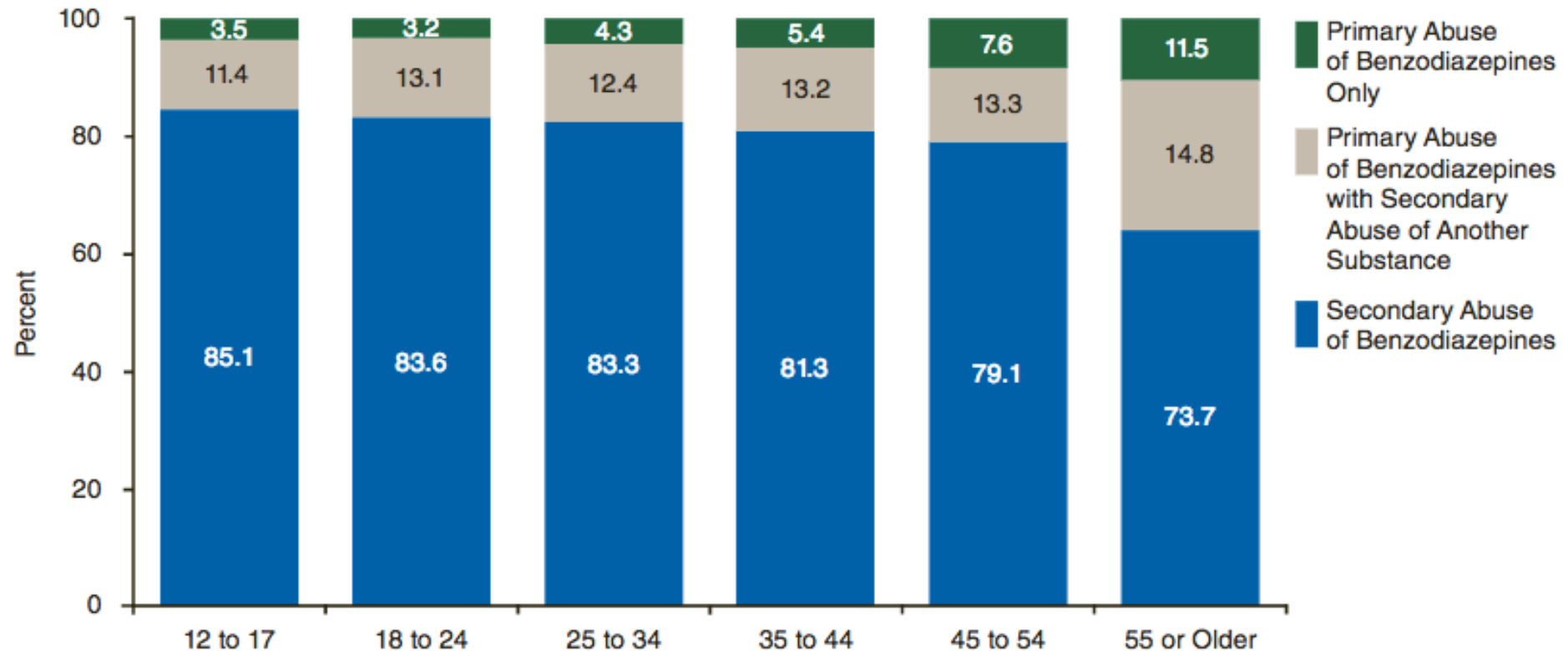
- Rarely the initial or primary substance of abuse
- Rarely used alone to produced intoxication
- Usually abuse with other substances
- Healthy patients prefer placebo to benzodiazepines
- *ETOH use disorder patients and their offspring are more likely to experience mood elevation with benzodiazepines*

# Concurrent use of other Substances

- A high percentage of alcohol dependent patients use benzodiazepines regularly (29-76%)
- 70-96% of patients admitted to inpatient addiction treatment on high dose benzodiazepine use have concurrent dependence on other substances
- It is uncommon to see patients with substance use disorder just on benzodiazepines. Concurrent use with other drugs is common just with benzodiazepine use
- BNZD are prescribed in 1 out of 5 patients on opioids
- Lethality when sedatives-hypnotics are combined with:
  - ETOH + BNZ
  - ↑ methadone + BNZ
  - buprenorphine + BNZ
  - Other CNS depressants + BNZ

# Epidemiology

## Primary and Secondary Benzodiazepine Admissions, by Age in 2008



*Note: Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding*

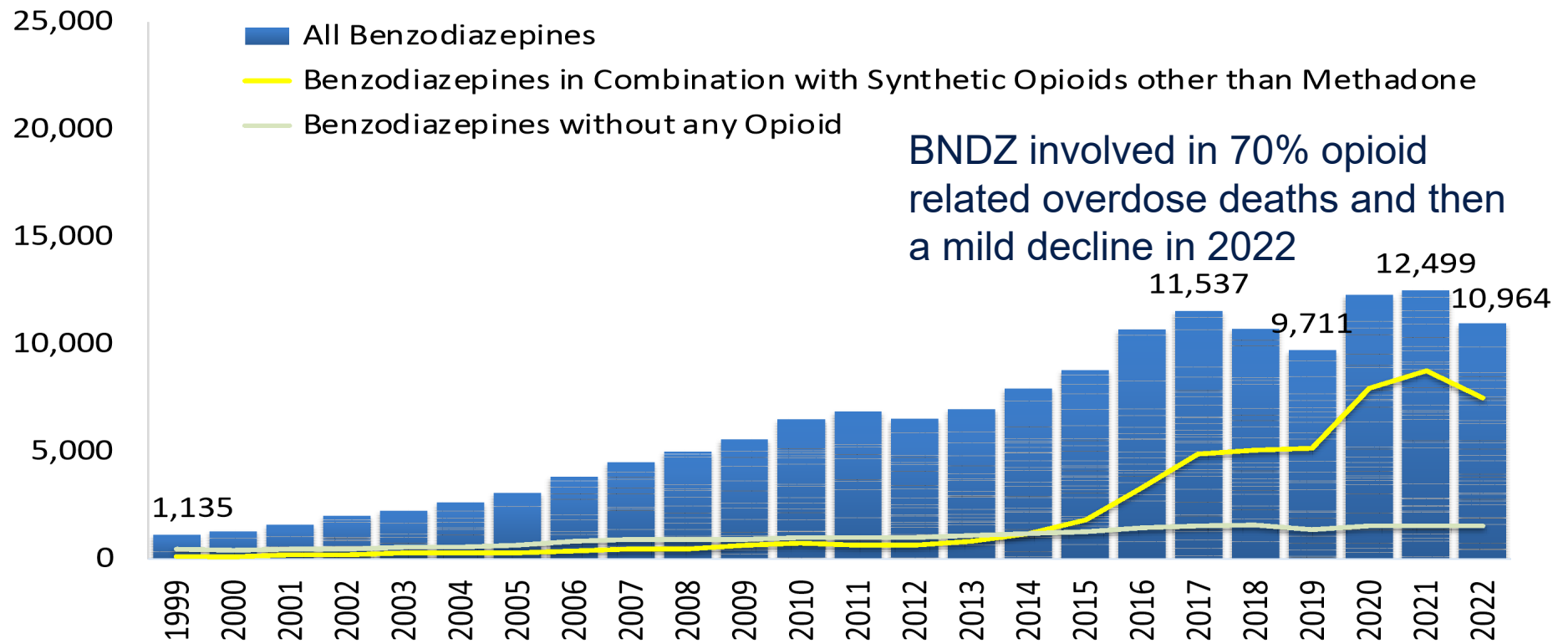
*Source: SAMHSA Treatment Episode Data Set (TEDS) 2008*

# Benzodiazepines + Opioids

- Benzodiazepines (BZs) are the most frequently cited co-intoxicants involved in opioid-related morbidity and mortality.
- In 2010, the CDC reported 16,651 pharmaceutical opioid-related overdose deaths based on death certificate data- almost one of every three opioid-related deaths in 2010 also involved BZs
- On August 31, 2016, FDA issued a drug-safety communication about risks when opioid pain or cough meds are combined with BZs.

# BZDs, by Opioid Involvement, Number among All Ages, 1999-2022

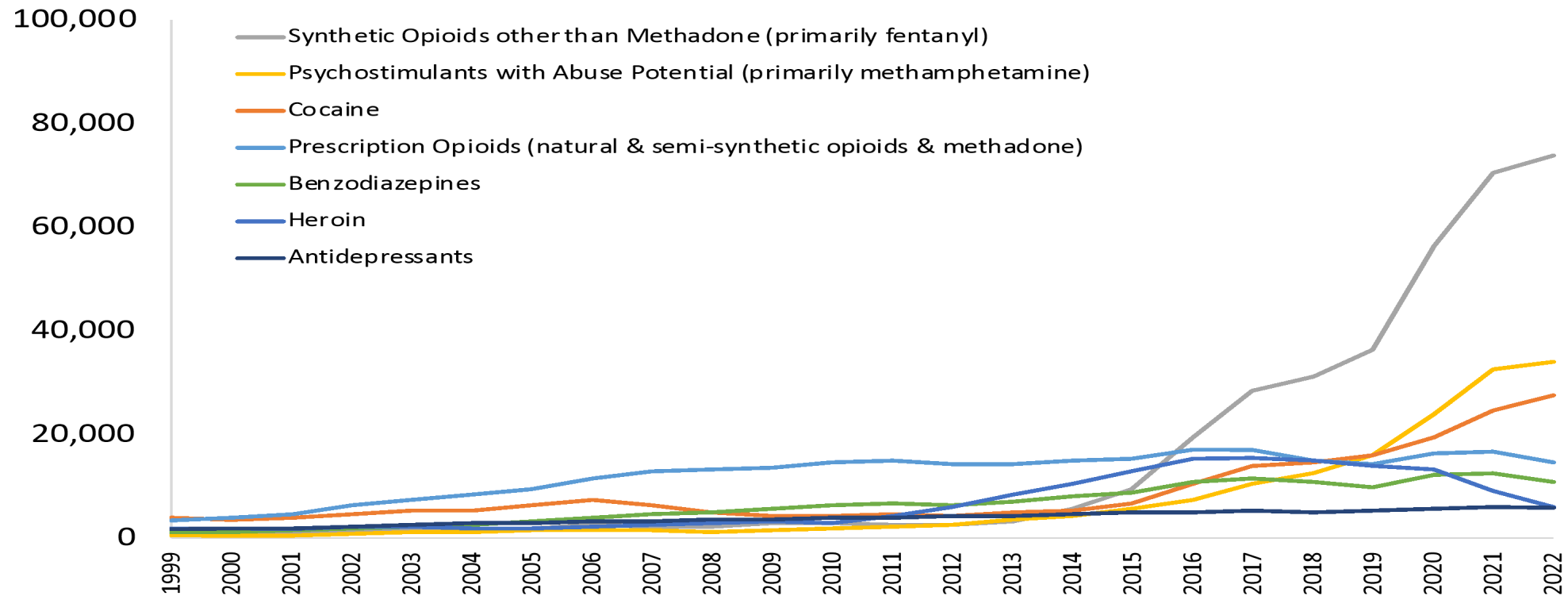
**Figure 9. U.S. Drug Overdose Deaths Involving Benzodiazepines\*, by Opioid Involvement, 1999-2022**



\*Among deaths with drug overdose as the underlying cause, the benzodiazepine category was determined by the T42.4 ICD-10 multiple cause-of-death code. Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics. Multiple Cause of Death 1999-2022 on CDC WONDER Online Database, released 4/2024.

# National Drug Overdose Involving Overdose Deaths, Number Among All ages, 1999-2022

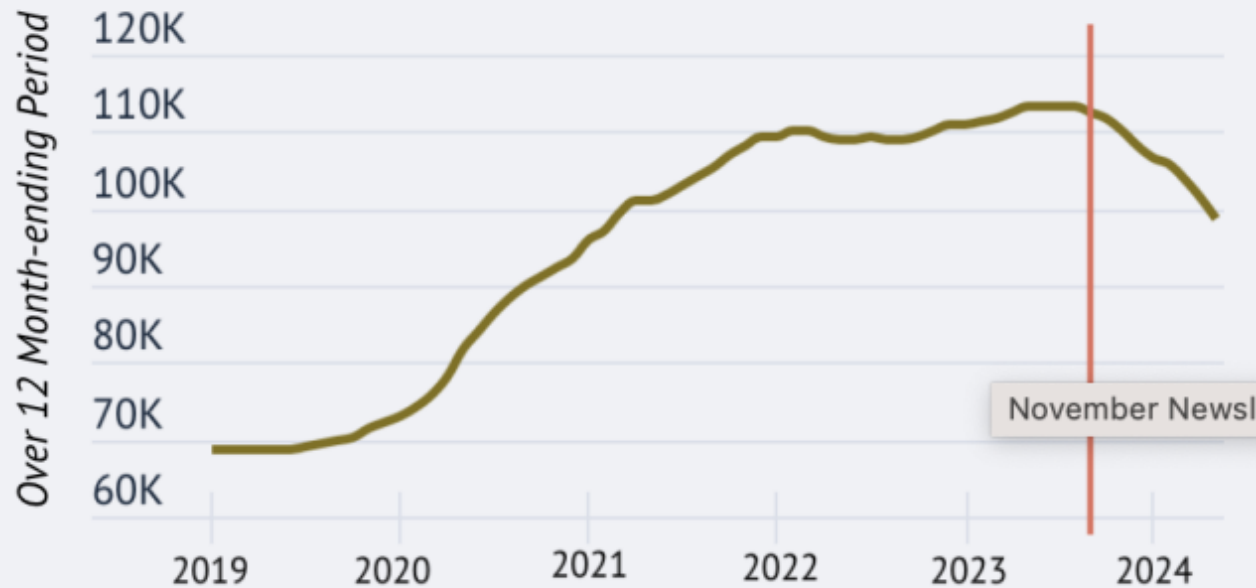
**Figure 2. U.S. Overdose Deaths\*,  
Select Drugs or Drug Categories, 1999-2022**



\*Includes deaths with underlying causes of unintentional drug poisoning (X40–X44), suicide drug poisoning (X60–X64), homicide drug poisoning (X85), or drug poisoning of undetermined intent (Y10–Y14), as coded in the International Classification of Diseases, 10th Revision. Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics. Multiple Cause of Death 1999–2022 on CDC WONDER Online Database, released 4/2024.

# Overdose Death Began to Drop

## Overdose Deaths Began to Drop in September 2023



## Potential Drivers of the Decrease Include:

- More naloxone availability
- Greater access to addiction treatment
- Crackdowns on illicitly manufactured fentanyl
- Less solitary use post-pandemic

Sources: Ahmad FB, Cisewski JA, Rossen LM, Sutton P. National Center for Health Statistics. Provisional drug overdose death counts. (October 2024).; Ovalle D. The Washington Post. Overdose deaths decline sharply after years of fentanyl-fueled surges. (October 2024).; NIHCM Foundation.

# ED Visits: Risk of Serious Outcomes

	12-34 yo	35-44 yo	45-64 yo	65+
BZD alone	28%	30%	37%	39%
BZD + opioids	37%	43%	47%	59%
BZD + alcohol	35%	43%	51%	55%
BZD + opioids + alcohol	39%	47%	57%	70%

# Epidemiology

- Most frequent abused pharmaceutical second only to opioids
- Alprazolam is the most frequently abused followed by Clonazepam, Lorazepam, and Diazepam
- BZDs are prescribed at about 65.9 million office-based doctor visits. That's a rate of 27 annual visits per 100 adults

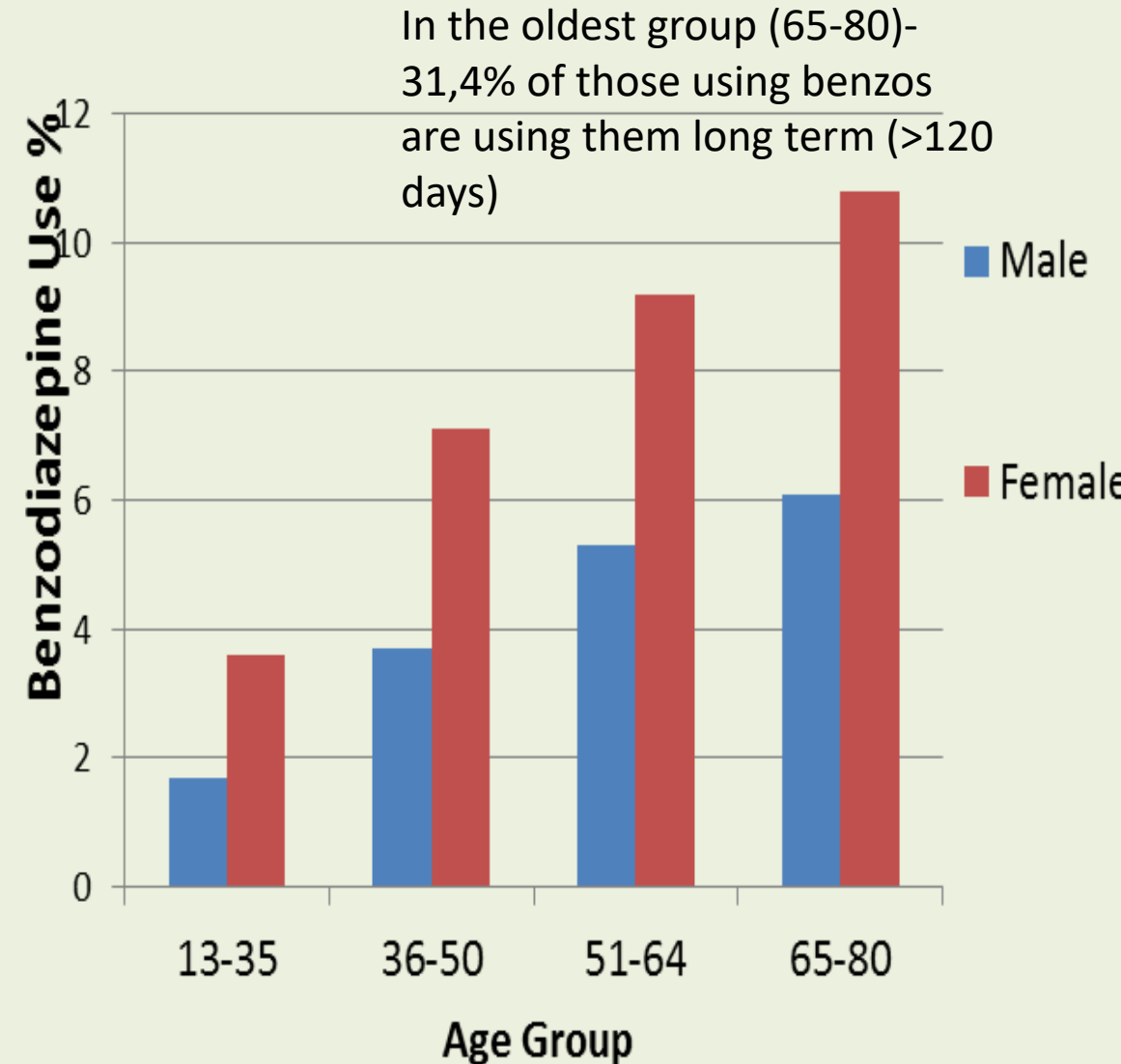
# Prevalence of Benzodiazepine Use

## Benzodiazepines:

- Use is nearly twice as prevalent in women
- Increased utilization with increasing age
- Proportion of long-term use increases with age
- Prescribed at greater rates than antidepressants for the treatment of depression and anxiety

Bernardy NC, et al. *J Gen Intern Med*, 2013. 28(S2): p S542-8; Demyttenaere, K., et al., *J Affect Disord*, 2008. 110(1-2): p. 84-93.; Benitez, C.I., et al., *Am J Geriatr Psychiatry*, 2008. 16(1): p. 5-13.; Maudsley Prescribing Guidelines in Psychiatry 12th Edition. 2015

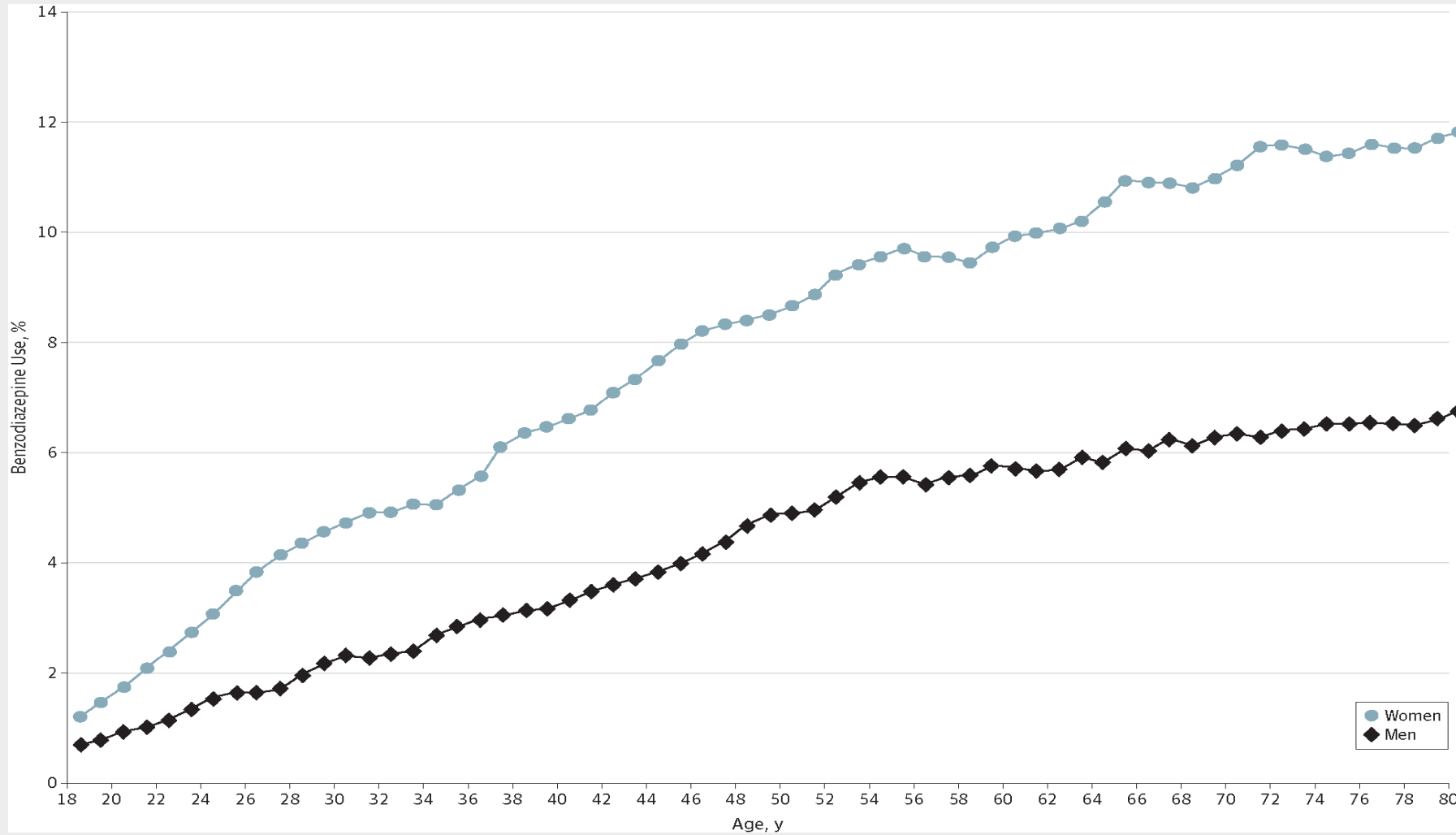
Figure 1. Prevalence of benzodiazepine use in the United States



Olfson M, et al. *JAMA Psychiatry*, 2015. 72(2): p. 136-42.

# Epidemiology

BZD Use %



12% women

7% men

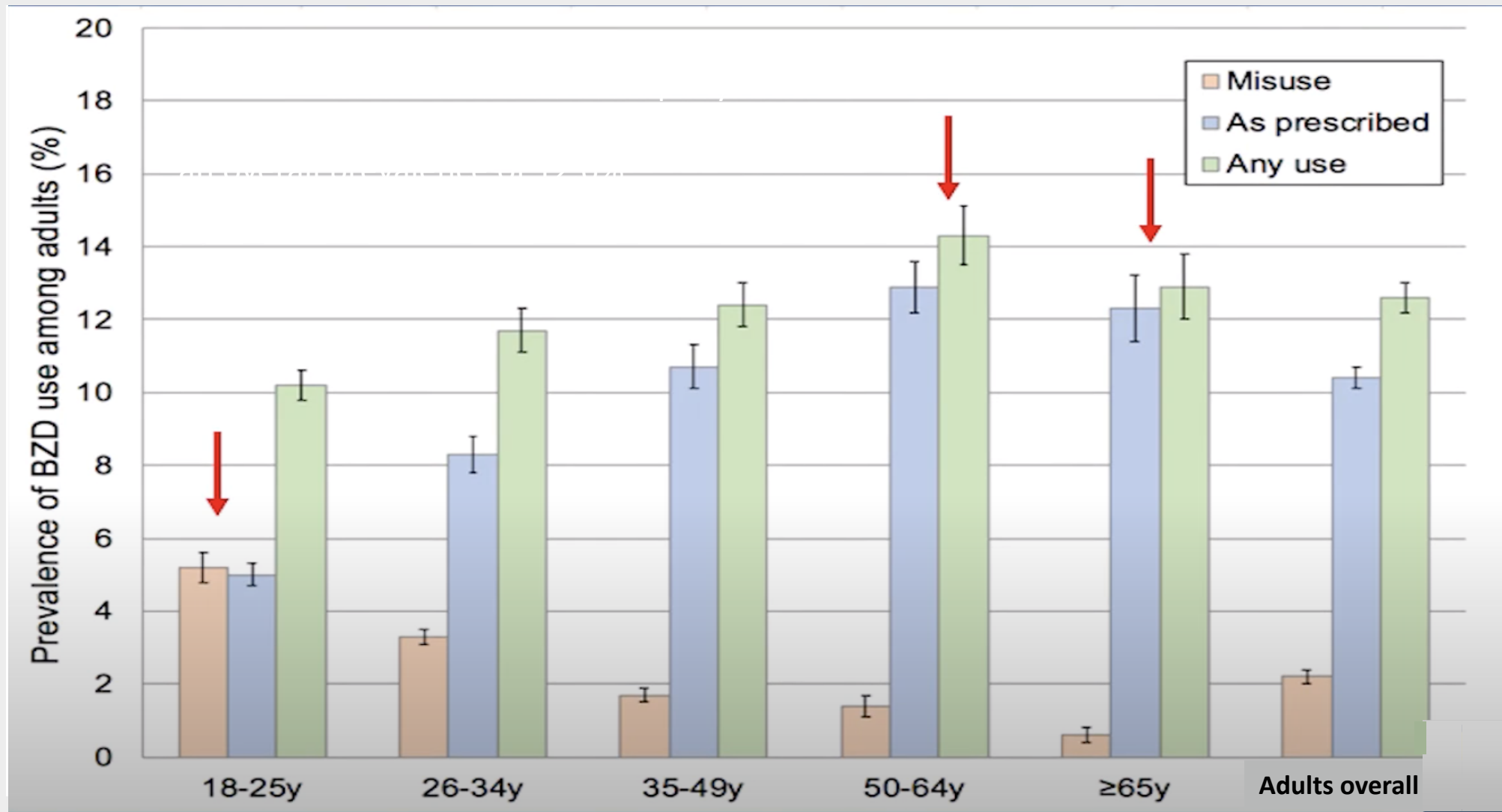
18

Age

80

Olfson M, et al. JAMA Psychiatry 2015;72(2):136-142.

# BZD use accumulates with age



Prevalence of prescription benzodiazepine use and misuse among 2015 and 2016 NSDUH respondents (**N=86,186**), by age group

<sup>a</sup>NSDUH, National Survey on Drug Use and Health

Maust DT, Lin LA, Blow FC. Benzodiazepine Use and Misuse Among Adults in the United States. *Psychiatr Serv.* 2019;70(2):97-106.

doi:10.1176/appi.ps.201800321

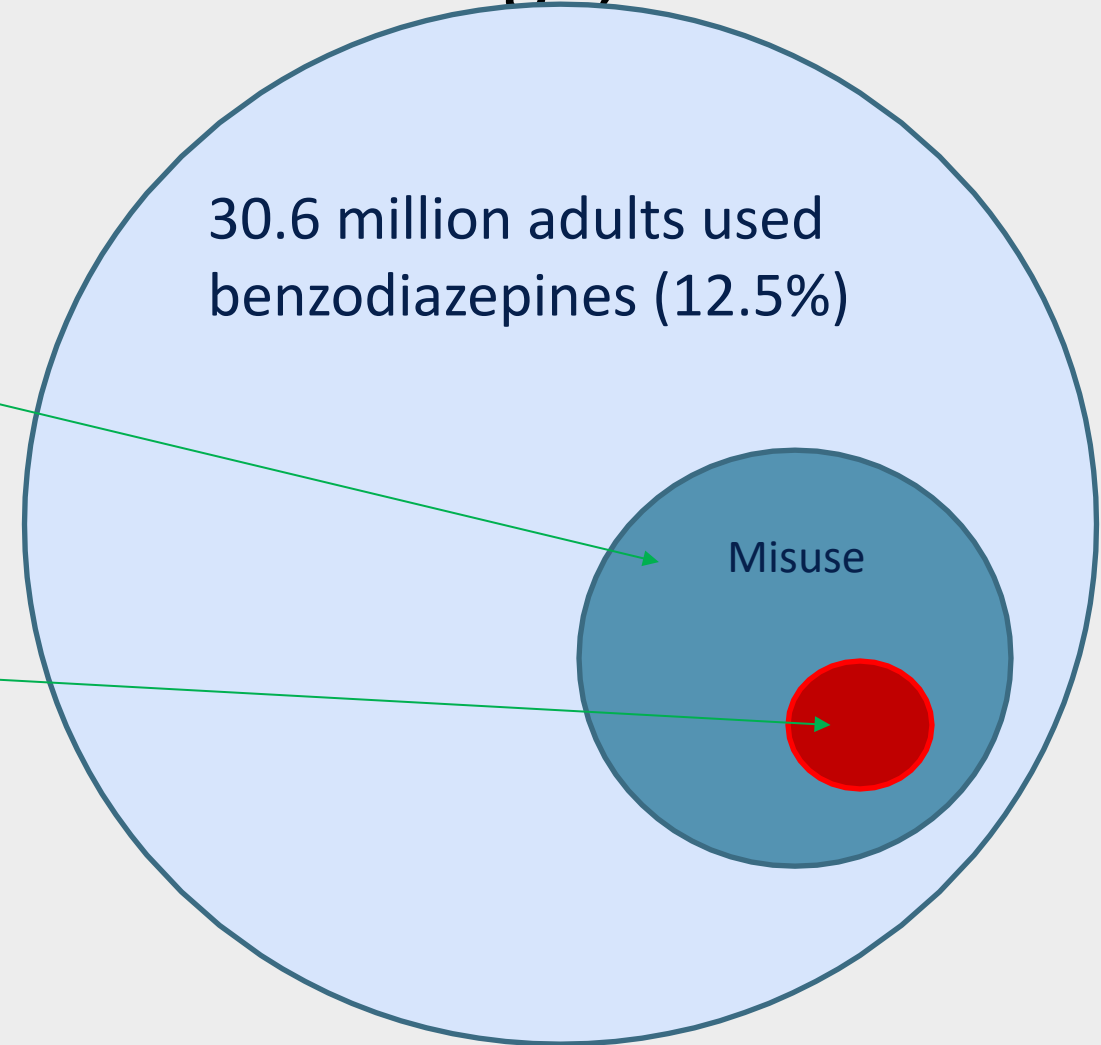
# Benzodiazepine Use, Misuse, and Use Disorder Among Adults in the United States: Annual Average, 2015-2016

National Surveys on Drug Use and Health

5.3 million adults misused  
benzodiazepines (2.1%)

0.5 million adults had benzodiazepine  
use disorders (0.2%):

- 0.3 million had benzodiazepine dependence
- 0.2 million had benzodiazepine abuse



# Case: RR

- Mr. RR did not receive his alprazolam refill from his PCP because, after taper, patient returned to his original dose and ran out of the prescription sooner. Mr. RR is upset and decided to see a psychiatrist who had planned to prescribe medication if ROI to contact PCP is signed.



# Case: RR

- Mr. RR reports that his heart has been racing and his insomnia has worsened; his friend states that, for the past four days, he has been having difficulty following conversations and focusing on daily tasks. He has been off alprazolam for seven days. Mr. RR denies any recent psychosocial stressors and does not endorse feelings of guilt, helplessness, or hopelessness. Furthermore, he denies any fever, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, myalgia, abdominal cramps, or seizures. He denies any recent alcohol or illicit drug use.



# Factors associated with prescribing benzos

- Anxiety
- Insomnia
- Pain
- Chronic Medical Condition
- Female
- White
- Retirement Low income
- Elderly
- Smoking
- Poor Health
- >1 Prescriber
- Computer prescribing

# Benzodiazepines and Addiction

Benzodiazepines are often not the primary substance abused and, when combined with other substances (e.g. alcohol, opioids), can have fatal consequences

- 5-10% - Patients newly started on benzodiazepines develop a substance use disorder
- 50% - Patients with substance use disorder history will develop a benzodiazepine use disorder
- 58-100% - Patients prescribed chronic benzodiazepines become physically dependent

*Guina, J., et al., J Psychiatr Pract, 2015. 21(4): p. 281-303.; Substance Abuse: A Comprehensive Textbook (4th ed.). Baltimore. MD: Lippincott. Williams & Wilkins. 2004. pp. 302-312.; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. The TEDS Report: Substance Abuse Treatment Admissions for Abuse of Benzodiazepines. . Rockville, MD., June 2, 2011.*

# Benzodiazepine Prescribing

- Patients associated with benzo long term-use:
  - Psychiatric co-morbidity
  - Less education
  - Loneliness/isolation
  - Avoidant coping behaviors
  - Older age (women, less education, low SES, chronic disease, functional limitations, cognitive impairment, anxiety, depression, insomnia)

# Benefits and Risks

- Population
  - Therapeutic dose dependent
  - Prescribed high-dose dependent (sedative use disorder)
  - Recreational benzodiazepine use
- Risk factors for benzo use disorder:
  - Longer duration of BNZ use
  - Higher Benzodiazepine doses
  - Lower level of education
  - Greater insomnia severity
  - Current antidepressant use

# Benefits and Risks

ACTION		CLINICAL USE
Anxiolytic	Relief of anxiety	Anxiety and panic disorders, phobias
		Agitated Psychosis
Hypnotic	Promotion of sleep	Insomnia
Myorelaxant	Muscle relaxation	Muscle spasms, spastic disorders
Anticonvulsant	Stop fits, convulsions	Fits to drug poisoning, some form of epilepsy, alcohol withdrawal
Amnesia	Impairment of short-term memory	Premedication for operations, sedation for minor surgical operations

# Benefits and Risks

## –prior prescribing benzodiazepines–

TOLERANCE and DOSE ESCALATION = WITHDRAWAL

- Examine the risk-benefit ratio
- Avoid nonbenzodiazepine hypnotic
- Short term use (4 weeks) is recommended

# Benefits and Risks (concerns)

- Long term use have shown deficits in: learning, memory, attention and visual spatial ability
- Anterograde Amnesia
- Adverse effects:
  - May contribute to psychomotor impairment and increase the risk of falls and automobile accidents
  - Psychomotor impairment is characterized by:
    - - Slow reaction time
    - - Diminish speed and accuracy for motor tasks
- Increase risk of hip fractures (50% increase risk) and recurrent falls in the elderly population
- OD with Benzodiazepine alone are almost never lethal (high therapeutic index) but OD with BBT alone can be
- Withdrawal symptoms prolong sedative overuse

Falls

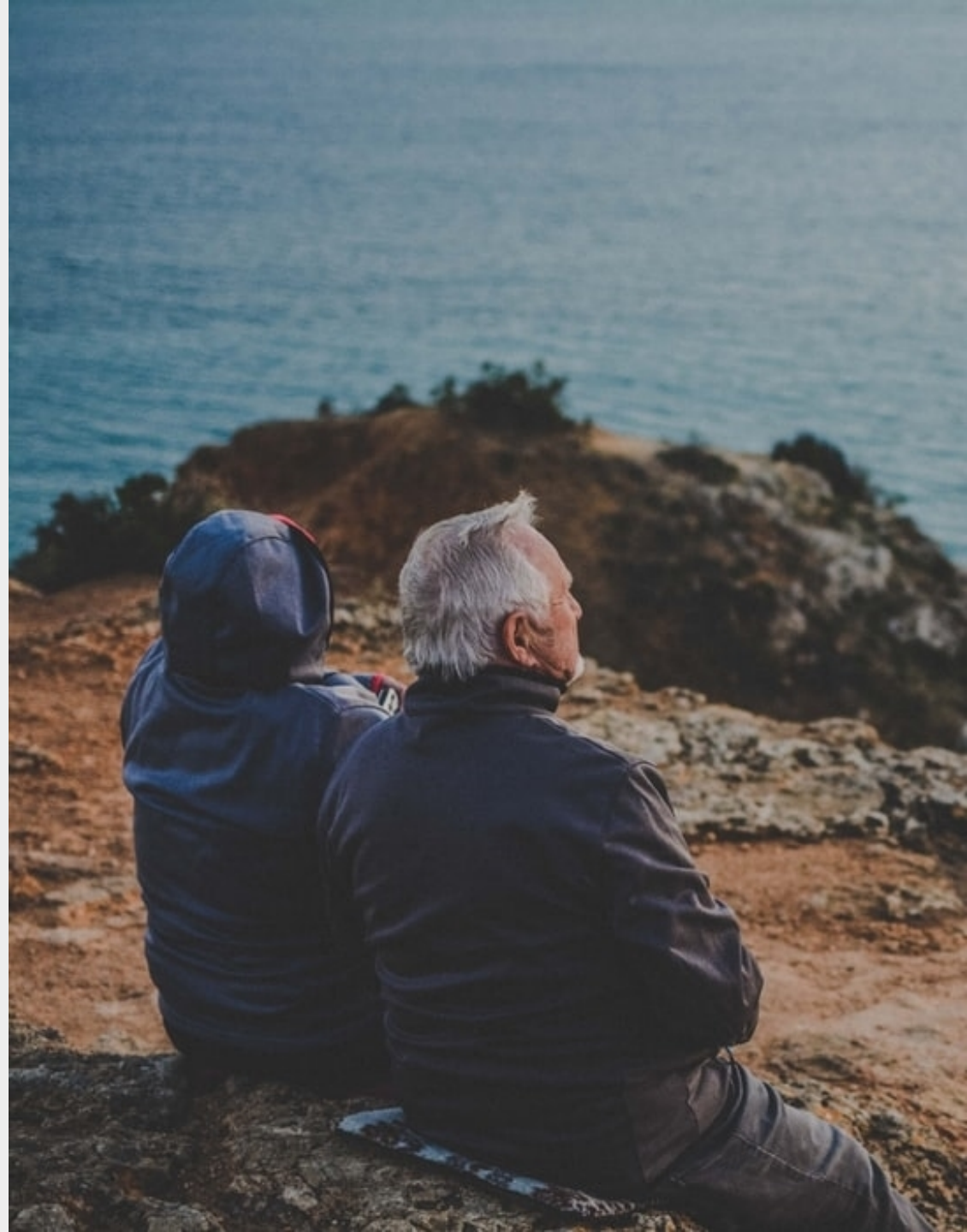
Hip  
Fractures

Sedation

Cognitive  
impairment

# Benefits and Risks (concerns)

- The 2015 American Geriatrics Society Beers Criteria recommend avoiding benzodiazepines in this population. Despite these consensus recommendations and known risk factors:
  - Benzodiazepine use is three times more prevalent in older adults compared to younger adults
  - Roughly one-quarter of long-term benzodiazepine use is in patients  $\geq 65$  years of age



# Considerations when prescribing BZs

- Examine the risk-benefit ratio
- Avoid nonbenzodiazepine hypnotic (Alternative)
- Inform patient of planned duration of therapy
- Prescribe for brief periods
- No refills without follow up
- Use random urine toxicology
- Attempt to taper dose
- Always check the Prescription Drug Monitoring Program (PDMP) before and during the treatment
- Formalize written treatment agreement

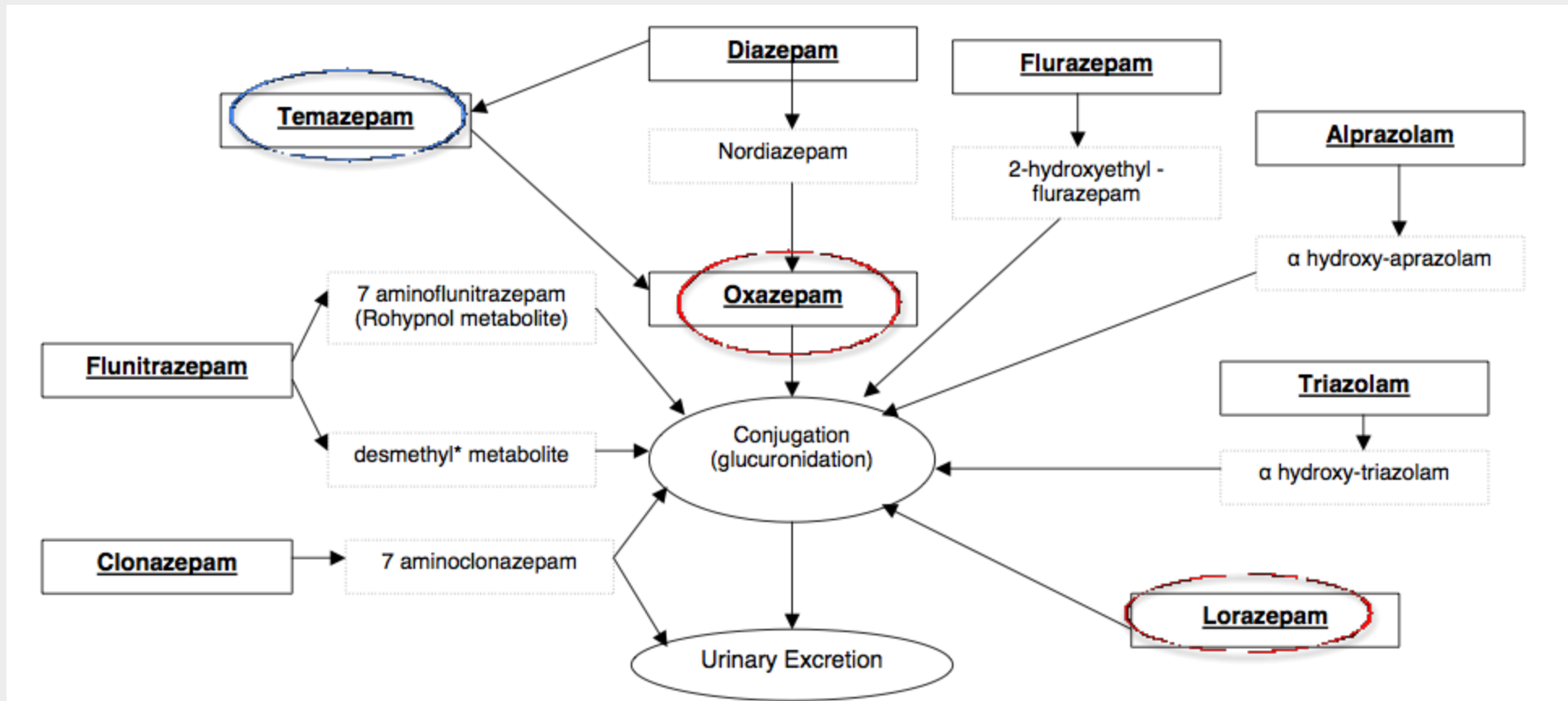
# Phases of Sedative-Hypnotic Treatment and Related Syndromes



# Equivalent Doses and Elimination half-lives of benzodiazepines

BENZODIAZEPINES	APPROXIMATELY EQUIVALENT DOSAGE (mg)	ELIMINATION HALF-LIFE (hrs)- (active metabolite)
Alprazolam *	0.5	6-12
Chlordiazepoxide	25	5-30 (36-200)
Clonazepam*	0.5	18-50
Diazepam	10	20-100 (36-200)
Flunitrazepam	1	18-26 (36-200)
Flurazepam	15-30	(40-250)
Lorazepam*	1	10-20
Oxazepam	20	4-15
Temazepam	20	8-22
Triazolam*	0.5	2

# Benzodiazepine Metabolism



# Types of Benzodiazepines

- 2-Keto benzodiazepines (Clonazepam, Diazepam, Chlordiazepoxide)  
All have long half-lives (23-100 hours)  
All have active metabolites (commonly desmethyldiazepam)  
Some administered as Prodrug
- 3-Hydroxy Benzodiazepines (Oxazepam, Temazepam, Lorazepam)  
Intermediate half-lives (most 10-15 hours)  
No active metabolites (better in elderly/hepatic impaired)  
Metabolized outside the liver (only need glucoronidation)
- Triazolo Benzodiazepines (Alprazolam, Triazolam)  
Short to Intermediate half lives (anywhere from <12 hours)  
Some have active metabolites

# Pharmacokinetics

BZDs are differentiated by their pharmacokinetic profiles, based on lipophilicity and metabolism:

- Half-life (short, intermediate, long)
- Onset-of-action (rapid, intermediate, slow)
- Metabolic pathways (with or without active metabolites, with or without P450 involvement)
- Pharmacokinetics are affected by:
  - Routes of administration
  - Rates of absorption
  - Rates of elimination

# Pharmacokinetics

## LONG ACTING

- Chlordiazepoxide
- Diazepam
- Clonazepam

## MEDIUM ACTING

- Lorazepam
- Oxazepam
- Temazepam

## SHORT ACTING

- Alprazolam
- Triazolam
- Midazolam

# Case: RR

PE: He was found to be **tachycardic** (pulse, 110 beats/min) and **hypertensive** (blood pressure, 170/90 mm Hg). His medical workup, including CBC count, electrolyte panel, liver function tests, blood glucose level, and urine toxicology screen were within normal limits.



# Case: RR

MSE: Casually dressed male who appeared to be **restless and irritable with twitches in his face and complains about tinnitus**. He was oriented to time, place, and person. His speech was normal in rate and content. His mood was subjectively **anxious** and objectively **dysphoric**, and his affect was congruent with mood. His thought form was linear and goal directed. There was no evidence of paranoid ideations/delusions. He denied any auditory or visual hallucinations. He scored 30/30 on the Mini-Mental State Examination. He had good insight and judgment. He endorsed passive suicidal ideations, no plan. He denied any homicidal ideations



# Management of Benzodiazepine Withdrawal

Variable presentation:

- There are no pathognomonic signs and symptoms of benzodiazepine withdrawal
- Assess for subjective and objective symptoms
- May have few concurrently observable hyper-adrenergic signs or vital sign fluctuations (unlike acute alcohol withdrawal)

Symptoms of anxiety state	Symptoms less common in anxiety states-relatively specific to benzodiazepine withdrawal
Anxiety, panic attacks, agoraphobia	Perceptual distortions, sense of movement
Insomnia, nightmares	Depersonalization, derealization
Depression, dysphoria	Hallucinations (visual, auditory)
Excitability, restlessness	Distortion of body image
Poor memory and concentration	Tingling, numbness, altered sensation
Dizziness, light headedness	Formication (skin “crawling”)
Weakness “jelly legs”	Sensory hypersensitivity (light, sound, taste, smell)
Tremor	Muscle twitches, jerks, fasciculation
Muscle pain, stiffness	Tinnitus
Sweating, night sweats	Psychotic Symptoms
Palpitations	Confusion, delirium
Blurred or double vision	Convulsions

# Management of Benzodiazepine Taper

Challenging process for both patients and doctors if you do not have a treatment plan with your patient

## Strategies:

- Gradual dosage tapering (avoid prn dosing)
- Psychological Support
- Reasons for prescribing
- Lifestyle
- Personality

# Management of Benzodiazepine Taper

- Take into account dosage and type of benzodiazepine
- Environment stresses
- Amount of available support
- Prepare for months or a year for the taper
- Individualize treatment adjusted to patient's needs (personalized treatment)- Partnership with the patient

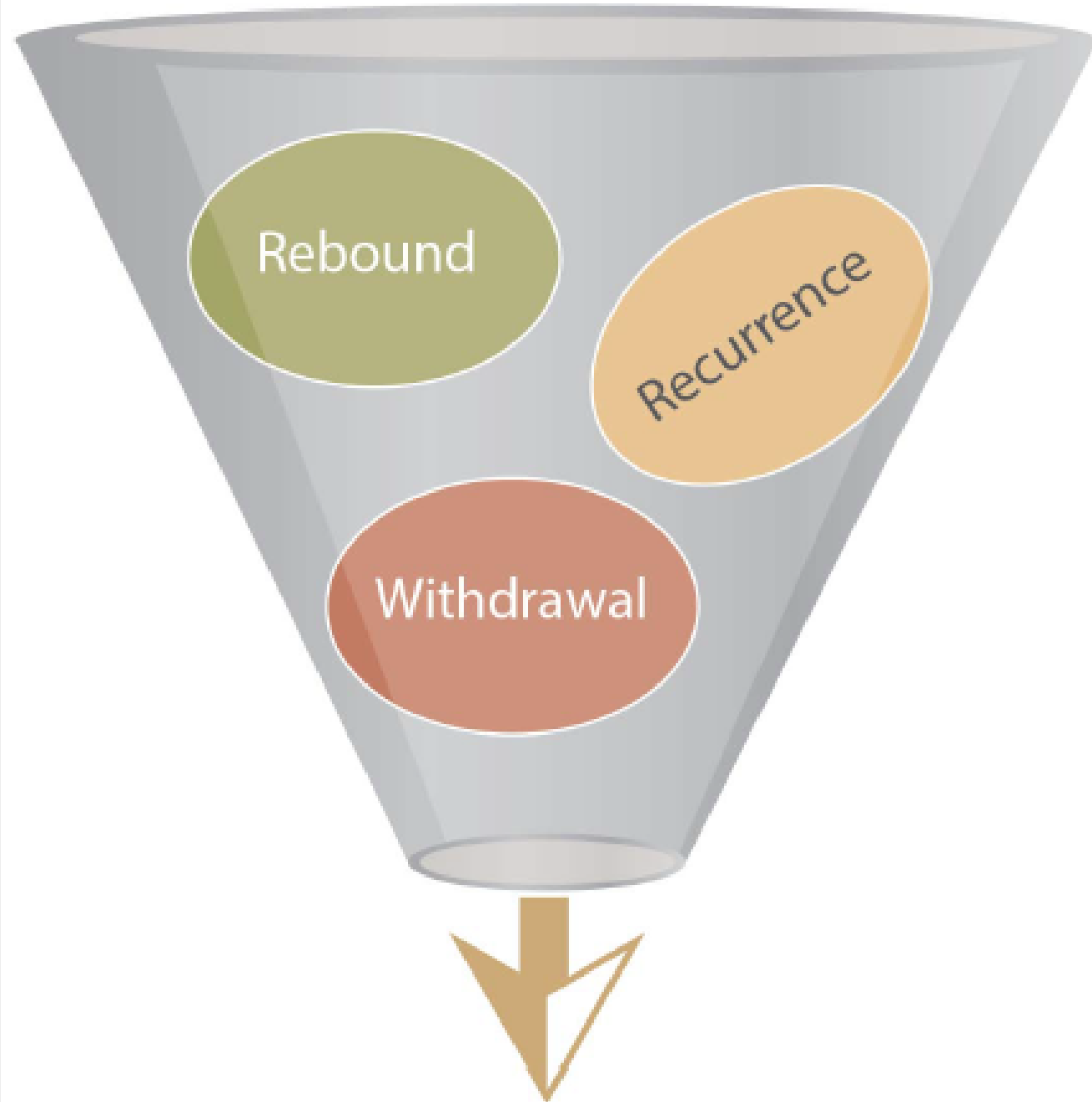
# Management of Benzodiazepine Withdrawal /Taper

Time course and severity are influenced by:

- Duration of use: short vs. long term use
- Dose: low/therapeutic dose vs. high dose
- Pharmacokinetics: short vs. long acting
- Host factors: comorbid pathology or substance use disorder

# What is the difference between withdrawal, rebound and recurrence?

- **Recurrence:** the person experiences the same symptoms and severity of symptoms that existed prior to treatment
- **Rebound:** occurs when a drug is withdrawn and the individual experiences anxiety symptoms that are more severe than those experience prior treatment
- **Withdrawal:** the time-limited development of unique symptoms as the result of discontinuing or decreasing the use of a psychoactive drug



# Management of Benzodiazepine Withdrawal

Time and Severity can vary

- Short Acting BZs and those with active metabolites when stopped, can lead to WD sx within hours
- Long Acting BZs with active metabolites can take 48 hours – 7 days for WD sx to emerge
- Severe WD from BZs can be accompanied by delirium

# Management of Benzodiazepine Withdrawal

## Duration of use and therapeutic dose:

- >10 days use with therapeutic dose:  
some experience transient insomnia
- <2 weeks with therapeutic dose:  
Most experience rebound
- >2 months with therapeutic dose:  
Most experience mild withdrawal

Of patients who take a benzodiazepine for more than a month, 47% (n=1048) become dependent

De Las Cuevas et al 2003

# Management of Benzodiazepine Withdrawal

## Duration of use and therapeutic dose:

- >4 to 6 months with therapeutic dose;
- Most experience mild to moderate withdrawal
- >12 months with therapeutic dose:
- 20-80% experience moderate to severe withdrawal

# Management of Benzodiazepine Withdrawal: When to Taper

- Over-sedation
- Cognitive impairment
- Concurrent Rx's or use of high-risk CNS depressants medications
  - Other BZs, non-BZ hypnotics, and OPIOIDS
- Alcohol use disorder and other SUDs
- Overuse, misuse, or BZ use disorder
- Patient request
- Older population at risk
- Other (PDMP/EMR findings)

# MANAGEMENT/Systematic discontinuation

- Tapering
- Substitution and tapering

# MANAGEMENT/Systematic discontinuation (deprescribing)

- Rate for dosage varies for different types of benzodiazepine pts:
- Withdrawal shows in 1- 7 days depending on half lives
- One-eighth to one-tenth of the daily dose (5-25% bi weekly)
  - Begin dose reduction of **5-10%** over **2-4 weeks**
  - **Not to exceed 25% every 2 weeks**
- Taper between 4 weeks to 6 months or more

# Management of Benzodiazepine Withdrawal

## Pharmacological /Strategies Treatment of Withdrawal

- Taper over months:
- Convert to longer acting agent like Clonazepam, Chlordiazepoxide, Diazepam)
- Taper gradually while starting alternative therapies if needed (months)
- Rebound psych meds for anxiety/sleep (Trazadone, Mirtazapine, Buspirone)
- Use of Anticonvulsant carbamazepine or valproate

# When do you see withdrawal symptoms?

- Short-acting BZD: oxazepam, triazolam, temazepam, alprazolam
- Short acting sedative-hypnotics: pentobarbital, secobarbital, meprobamate, metaqualone
  - Withdrawal onset in 12-24 hrs with
  - Peak of withdrawal intensity-day 1 to 5
  - Duration of acute withdrawal- 7 to 21 day

# When do you see withdrawal symptoms?

- Long-acting BZD and sedative-hypnotics: diazepam, chlordiazepoxide, phenobarbital
  - Withdrawal Onset within 5 - 14 days of cessation
  - Peak of Withdrawal Intensity - Days 1 to 9
  - Duration of Acute Withdrawal - 10-28 days
    - Protracted withdrawal symptoms for months

# Phenobarbital Substitution and Taper

- Substitution of benzodiazepine with equipotent dose of phenobarbital
- For inpatient, medically monitored setting only
- Effective Strategy for:
  - High dose dependent
  - Poly-Substance Dependence
  - Concurrent Alcohol/other Sedative Hypnotic
  - Unknown or erratic polypharmacy drug use

# Phenobarbital Substitution and Taper

- Establish Stabilization Dose by Computing Phenobarbital equivalents

- Alprazolam 1 mg=PB 30 mg
- Clonazepam 2mg=PB 30 mg
- Diazepam 10 mg=PB 30 mg
- Lorazepam 2 mg=PB 30 mg
- Carisoprodol 700 mg=PB 30 mg

- PB should be give TID or QID
- Maximum PB starting dose 500mg/day

# Phenobarbital Substitution and Taper

- Monitor patient for signs of toxicity before administering each dose
- Signs of PB toxicity are easy to observe:
  - Sustained horizontal nystagmus
  - Ataxia
  - Slurred Speech
- If intoxication observed:
  - If 1 sign of toxicity observed, skip one dose
  - If 2 signs of toxicity observed, skip 2 doses
  - Recalculate new daily dose

# Phenobarbital Substitution and Taper

- Once stabilization dose is established: maintain patient on initial dose for two days
- If patient has neither signs of withdrawal or toxicity, then patient is moved to the withdrawal phase
- Decrease phenobarbital 30 mg/day unless signs of toxicity or withdrawal are seen
- If patient develops objective signs of withdrawal. Daily dose is adjusted upward by 50% and patient is stabilized before continuing withdrawal

# Pregnancy

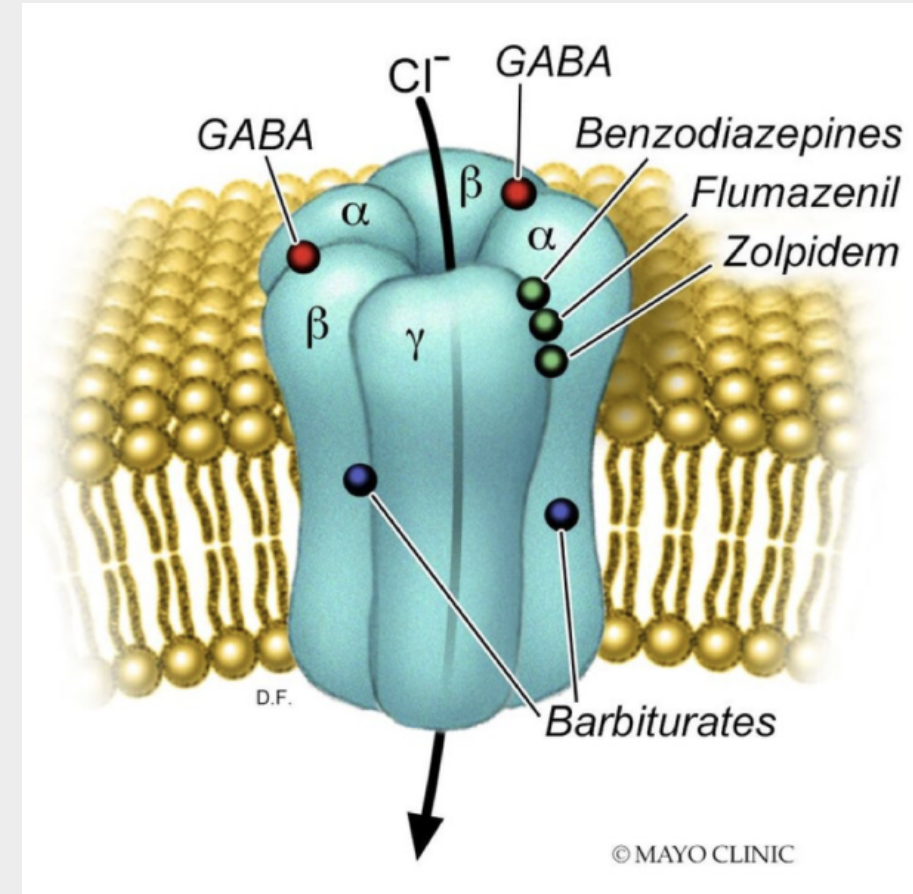
- Pregnant and lactating women are relatively contraindicated due to:
  - Ability of benzodiazepines to cross fetal placental barrier and to pass into breast milk
  - Teratogenic effects
  - Floppy baby syndrome
  - Neonatal withdrawal

# Flumazenil

- Reverse the sedation produced by a benzodiazepine (Acute O.D with benzodiazepine)
- Nonspecific competitive antagonist of benzodiazepine receptor
- May up regulate BZ receptors
- IV use 1 mg monitor pt every 30-60 minutes
- Adverse effects: seizures, cardiac arrhythmias and acute precipitated withdrawal

# Z-Drugs (Selective nonbenzodiazepine hypnotics)

- Zaleplon
- Zolpidem
- Eszopiclone
- Zopiclone\*
- Lower the risk for residual daytime drowsiness due to shorter duration of action
- Short term use
- Bind to sub-types of GABA A receptors –  $\alpha 1$  subunit that specifically modulate sleep and therefore are thought to have less unwanted side effects
- SE: risk of increased sleep-related behaviors
- Apply the general principles prescribing benzodiazepines to the Z-drugs



# Barbiturates

- The oldest sedative hypnotics
- Classified in three different pharmacokinetics category
- In the past used for treatment of anxiety disorders
- BBT: low therapeutic index
- Replaced by benzodiazepines
- BBT induce the synthesis of hepatic cytochrome P450, thus alter their own metabolism and the metabolism of other meds

# Barbiturates

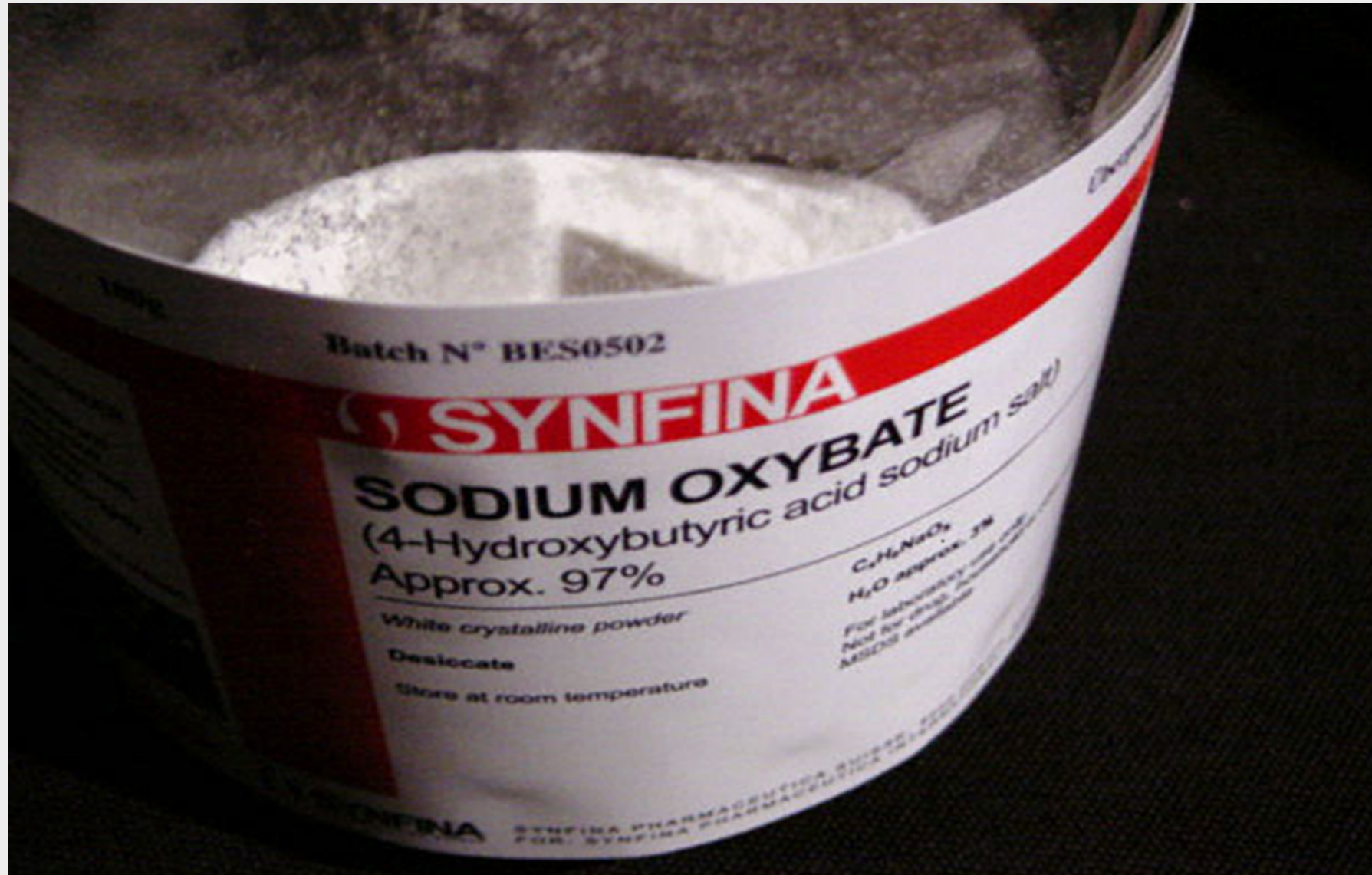
Duration of Action	LS	Onset	Duration	Use
Ultrashort	H	10-20 s	20-30 min	IV anesthesia
Thiopental				
Methohexital				
Short/Intermediate	M	20-40 min	5-8 h	Surgical anesthesia and sleep induction
Amobarbital				
Secobarbital				
Pentobarbital				
Long	L	Over 1 h	10-12 h	Prolong sedation and seizure control
Phenobarbital				
Meprobarbital				

# GHB

## Gamma-Hydroxy-Butyrate

“When I wake up,  
I feel completely refreshed.  
In comparison to the other drugs that  
are supposed to be ‘clean,’  
G really is clean.”

# FDA approved: Narcolepsy with cataplexy



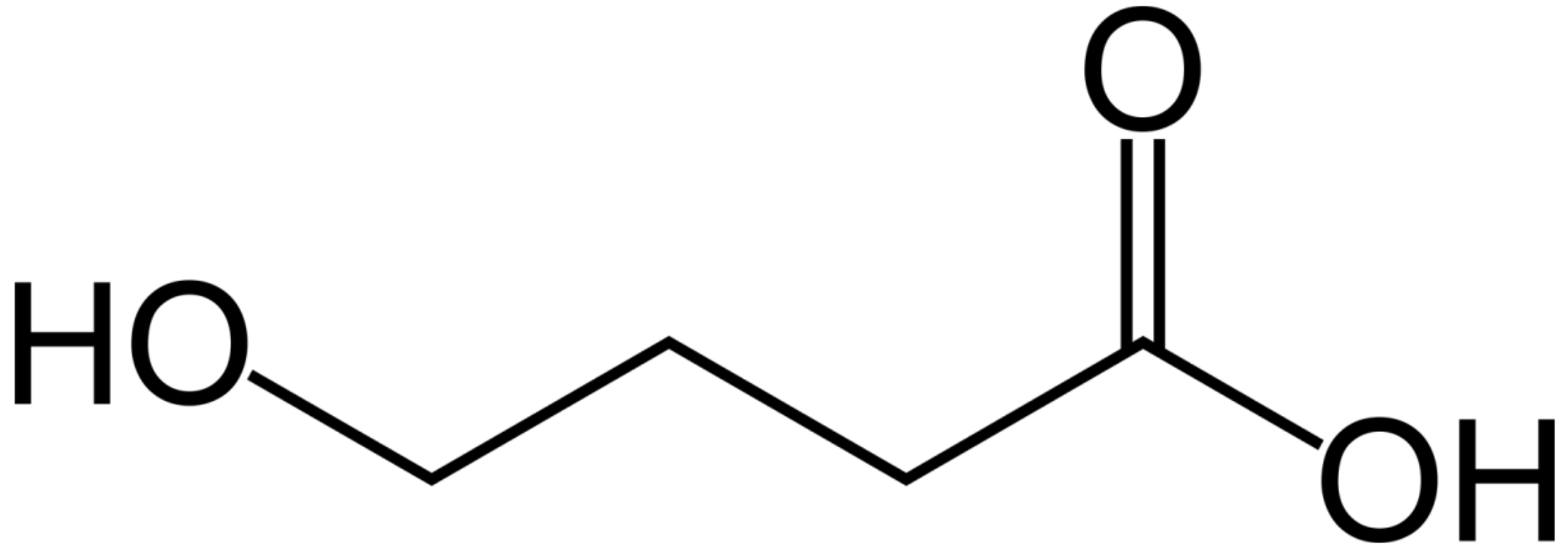
# Effects

- Sensual drug, like MDMA, but also resulting in “the greatest sex ever.”
- Relaxation, tranquility, placidity, mild euphoria, disinhibition.
- Temporary amnesia (hence “the date rape drug”).
- Has been used as a muscle developer and fat burner

# Neurobiology

- GHB is a neurotransmitter.
- Short half life (30 minutes)
- It is both a precursor and a metabolite of GABA.
- Activity on both the GABAB and the GHB binding sites, results in:
  - Temporary suppression of dopamine,
  - Subsequent marked release of dopamine, and
  - Increased release of endogenous opioids.
- Also it is a highly regulated Schedule III medication for narcolepsy (Xyrem).

# The Molecular Structure



# Intoxication

- Steep dose-response curve:
  - Ataxia, loss of coordination.
  - Respiratory depression, bradycardia, hypotension
  - Coma, persistent vegetative states, death
  - Overdose is a real danger (LD50 is only 5 times the recreational dose).
  - Synergistic effect with alcohol/other sedatives.
- Treat as a medical emergency:
  - ABCs, consider Intensive Care Unit admission.
  - Atropine for bradycardia.

# Withdrawal

- Withdrawal is rare but severe.
- Mild withdrawal may persist for several weeks after cessation of use:
  - Anxiety, tremor, insomnia.
  - “Feelings of doom.”
- Severe withdrawal resembles barbiturate withdrawal:
  - Treat with benzodiazepines.

# Long Term Features

- Physiological dependence.
- Most patients who overdose on GHB recover completely.
- No FDA approved medications.
- MET and CBT are the major treatment modalities.



## Get in Touch

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301.656.3920



education@asam.org



www.asam.org