

# FEAR OF FLYING: medication requests

People often come to us requesting the doctor or nurse to prescribe diazepam for fear of flying or assist with sleep during flights.

Benzodiazepines (eg. Diazepam/ Lorazepam/ Temazepam/ Alprazolam/ Clonazepam) are classed as a Class C/Schedule IV controlled drug. The following short guide outlines the issues surrounding its use with regards to flying and why **the surgery no longer prescribes such medications for this purpose.**

Diazepam is a sedative, which means it makes you sleepy and more relaxed. There are a number of very good reasons why prescribing this drug is not recommended.

- According to the prescribing guidelines doctors follow (British National Formulary) diazepam is not allowed in treating phobic states.[i] It also states that “the use of benzodiazepines to treat short-term ‘mild’ anxiety is inappropriate.”[ii] Your doctor would be taking a significant legal risk by prescribing against these guidelines. They are only licensed short term for a crisis in generalised anxiety. If this is the case, you should be getting proper care and support for your mental health before going on a flight.
- NICE guidelines suggest that medication should not be used for mild and self-limiting mental health disorders[iii]. In more significant anxiety related states, benzodiazepines, sedating antihistamines or antipsychotics should not be prescribed. Benzodiazepines are only advised for the short-term use for a crisis in generalised anxiety disorder in which case they are not fit to fly. Fear of flying in isolation is not a generalised anxiety disorder.
- Although plane emergencies are a rare occurrence there are concerns about reduced awareness and reaction times for patients taking Diazepam which could pose a significant risk of not being able to react in a manner which could save their life in the event of an emergency on board necessitating evacuation.
- Whilst most people find Diazepam sedating it can also cause disinhibition and lead you to behave in a way that you would not normally which can pose a risk on the plane. This could impact on your safety as well as that of other passengers and could also get you into trouble with the law. 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 several countries[iv]. They may be confiscated, or you may find yourself in trouble with the police. The passenger may also need to use a different strategy for the homeward bound journey and/or other legs of the journey.
- It is important to declare all medical conditions and medications you take to your travel insurer. If not, there is a risk of nullifying any insurance policy you may have.
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Given the above **we will no longer be providing Diazepam or similar drugs for flight anxiety** and instead suggest the below aviation industry recommended flight anxiety courses.

**Flight anxiety does not come under the remit of General Medical Services as defined in the GP contract and so we are not obliged to prescribe for this. Patients who still wish to take benzodiazepines for flight anxiety are advised to consult with a private GP or travel clinic.**

**For further information:**

<https://thefearofflying.com/programs/fly-and-be-calm/>

<https://www.fearlessflyer.easyjet.com/>

<https://www.britishairways.com/en-gb/information/travel-assistance/flying-with-confidence>

<https://www.flyingwithoutfear.com/>

Refs

[i] British National Formulary; Diazepam - <https://bnf.nice.org.uk/drug/diazepam.html>

[ii] British National Formulary; Hypnotics and anxiolytics - <https://bnf.nice.org.uk/treatment-summary/hypnotics-and-anxiolytics.html>

[iii] Generalised anxiety disorder and panic disorder in adults: management. NICE Clinical guideline [CG113] Published date: January 2011 Last updated: July 2019 <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg113>

[iv] **Travel Health Pro; Medicines and Travel; Carrying medication abroad and advice regarding falsified medication** <https://travelhealthpro.org.uk/factsheet/43/medicines-abroad>