



Benzodiazepines

When the Prescription Meant to Help Leads To a Bigger Problem

What is Benzodiazepine Addiction?

Benzodiazepine addiction is a chronic brain disorder that often begins with a legitimate prescription for anxiety, panic, or insomnia. These medications alter brain chemistry rapidly, and the body adapts to their presence within weeks. Once dependence takes hold, the brain requires benzodiazepines to regulate stress and sleep, making the medication itself the source of the crisis it was prescribed to treat.

What Does It Look Like?

- **Running Out of Prescriptions Early**
They increase the dose on their own and scramble to refill or find more before the month is over.
- **Panic and Physical Illness Between Doses**
Severe anxiety, tremors, sweating, or insomnia surface within hours of a missed dose.
- **Seeking Multiple Sources**
They see more than one prescriber or acquire pills from friends, family, or online.
- **Cognitive Decline the Family Cannot Ignore**
Memory gaps, slurred speech, confusion, and emotional flatness become part of daily life.

Why Does Benzodiazepine Addiction Become Chronic?

When someone has repeatedly tried to stop benzodiazepines and keeps returning, the cycle is being driven by the drug's grip on the brain and body.

- 1) **Withdrawal Can Be Medically Dangerous**
Abrupt cessation after chronic use risks life-threatening seizures. Even gradual tapering can produce rebound anxiety and insomnia.
- 2) **Addressing Neurological Adaptation**
Short-term programs may stabilize the initial withdrawal, but the brain's stress and sleep systems need time to heal.
- 3) **Underlying Anxiety and Trauma**
Anxiety, panic disorder, PTSD, and depression commonly drive benzodiazepine dependence.

Prevalence:

12.6% of U.S. adults report benzodiazepine use annually¹

Co-Occurrence:

Over 75% of misuse is driven by self-treatment for anxiety, sleep, or emotional distress²

Relapse Risk:

75% of those with complicated dependence relapse within 1 year³

Sources: ¹ Maust et al., *Psychiatric Services* (2019);

National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 2015-2016.

² Votaw et al., *Drug and Alcohol Dependence* (2019);

Systematic review of benzodiazepine misuse epidemiology.

³ Brett & Murnion, *Australian Prescriber* (2015).

Long-Term Treatment for Benzodiazepine Addiction

Benzodiazepine use **reshapes the brain's stress and sleep systems through months or years of daily use**. A short-term program can start a taper, but it cannot complete one safely for chronic users or address the anxiety and trauma that sustain the dependence. Families watch their loved one leave short-term programs still tapering, still anxious, and still convinced they need the medication.

Our long-term, progress-based model **gives the brain and body time to stabilize** through safe, medically supervised withdrawal while treating the anxiety, trauma, and thought patterns that drove the dependence.



“With benzodiazepines, the taper itself is a clinical intervention that can take months. Rush it, and the rebound anxiety sends the person right back to the medication. Long-term treatment gives us time to do this safely.”

 **Meghan Bohlman, LPC-S, LCDC, EMDR-Trained**
Executive Clinical Director, Burning Tree Ranch



Dual Diagnosis Treatment for Benzodiazepine Addiction

Benzodiazepine dependence rarely exists in isolation. The **underlying anxiety disorders, panic disorder, PTSD, and depression** that prompted the original prescription remain active, and each condition reinforces the other. Treating only the substance use without resolving the underlying conditions keeps the person trapped in the cycle of relapse.

At Burning Tree Ranch, an individualized treatment plan addresses **benzodiazepine dependence alongside co-occurring mental health disorders**, trauma, and mood disorders through evidence-based therapies including CBT, DBT, EMDR, and trauma-informed care, building toward lasting, sustainable sobriety.

Dual Diagnosis Defined:

The presence of **both a substance use disorder and a mental health condition** occurring together. Effective treatment for dual-diagnosis addictions must address both aspects simultaneously.



Have Other Treatment Programs Missed the Deeper Issues?

Burning Tree Ranch is the Nation's only authentic long-term treatment program for chronic relapse. Call us at (866) 287-2877 or visit us online at www.BurningTree.com.

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