

Tablets for fear of flying: why we do not prescribe them anymore.

People sometimes ask their clinician to prescribe Diazepam, or similar drugs such as Lorazepam, Temazepam or Clonazepam, for fear of flying or to help sleep during flights. Prescribing these drugs is not recommended for these reasons:

1. Although plane emergencies are rare, taking Diazepam reduces awareness and reaction times for patients so you risk not being able to react to save your life if you must evacuate quickly. You may also put other people in danger by getting in their way or requiring them to help you.
2. The use of these drugs can make you sleep in an unnaturally deep sleep. This means you will not move around as much as during natural sleep, which may increase your risk of developing a blood clot (Deep Vein Thrombosis - DVT) in the leg. Blood clots can be very dangerous and, if they then travel to your lungs can cause serious illness or death. The risk of DVT increases if your flight is longer than 4 hours.
3. They have short term negative effects on memory, co-ordination, concentration, and reaction times, and are addictive if used for a long time, with withdrawal leading to fits, hallucinations, agitation, and confusion. They have also become widely used drugs of abuse since they first came on the market. Diazepam in the UK is a controlled drug. The prescribing guidelines doctors follow do not include situational anxiety related to flying as an indication for prescribing these drugs.
4. Some people get more (not less) agitated and aggressive after taking Diazepam or similar drugs and behave in a way that they would not normally, which can pose a risk on a plane. This effect can occur even if you have used them previously with benefit. These drugs can also cause disinhibition, in a similar manner to alcohol, and may lead you to behave in an appropriate way, that may affect everyone's safety and in worst cases lead to removal from a flight.
5. There is evidence to suggest that use of these drugs stops the normal adjustment response that would gradually lessen anxiety over time, and this may increase anxiety in the long term, especially if used repeatedly.
6. Diazepam and similar controlled drugs are illegal in several countries. They may be confiscated, or it may lead to police or legal action.
7. Diazepam stays in your system for some time. If your job or sport needs you to have random drug testing you may fail this having taken Diazepam.

After considering these points above, our clinicians will no longer be providing Diazepam or similar drugs for flight anxiety. Instead, please consider trying one of the following aviation industry recommended flight anxiety courses:

Fly and Be Calm

www.flyandbecalm.co.uk/

Easy Jet

www.fearlessflyer.easyjet.com

British Airways

<https://flyingwithconfidence.com>

Anxiety UK

<https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/anxiety-type/fear-of-flying/>

Other information

Travel Health Pro; Medicines and Travel; Carrying medication abroad and advice regarding falsified medication

<https://travelhealthpro.org.uk/factsheet/43/medicines-abroad>

Do always remember that it is important to tell your travel insurer about your medical conditions and medications you take. If not, there is a risk of your insurer not paying if you try to make a claim.