

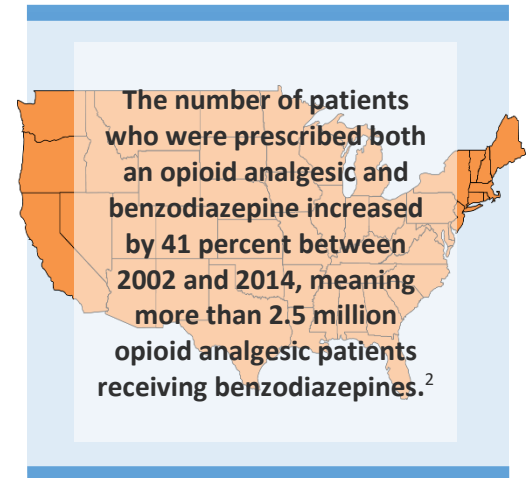
High-Risk Medications: Resource of the Month

Opioids: Strong Warnings Against Combining Opioids for Pain, Cough Medicines, and Benzodiazepines

Most of us know that opioids are used to treat pain while benzodiazepines are used to treat anxiety, insomnia, and seizures. But did you know that some prescription cough syrups also contain opioids? What happens when a patient who routinely takes Ativan for anxiety catches a cold and is now taking “the cough syrup the doctor prescribed for me” at bedtime in order to get a good night’s sleep? If that cough syrup has codeine in it, the results could be disastrous and even life threatening because it is combining an opioid and benzodiazepine. This is so serious that the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) now requires its strongest warning, called a Boxed Warning, to be used.¹

So, what can we do about this?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) 2016 Guideline for Prescribing Opioids for Chronic Pain cautions against co-prescribing opioids and benzodiazepines. As a caregiver, you may not quickly recognize the names of the most commonly prescribed opioids and benzodiazepines. To assist you, use the pocket-card list below and distribute it to your staff members. When medication reconciliation or medication administration is occurring, healthcare providers should be aware of the listed medications and verify that the two drugs are needed. And if the prescriber does verify that they want the opioid and benzodiazepine to be given, then provide education to the patient or their family member about the risks of respiratory depression and sedation if opioids are used with benzodiazepines, alcohol, or other central nervous system (CNS) depressants (including illicit or recreational drugs).



Generic Name	Brand Name(s)
Benzodiazepines	
Commonly used for Anxiety	
Alprazolam	Xanax, Xanax XR
Diazepam	Valium, Diastat
Clonazepam	Klonopin
Chlordiazepoxide	Librium, Librax
Lorazepam	Ativan
Commonly used as Sleeping Aids	
Flurazepam	Dalmane
Triazolam	Halcion
Temazepam	Restoril

Generic Name	Brand Name(s)
Opioids	
Hydrocodone containing acetaminophen	Vicodin, Lortab, Norco, Lorcet
Oxycodone with acetaminophen	Percocet
Oxycodone with aspirin	Percodan
Oxycodone Hydrochloride (HCL)	OxyContin
Codeine containing acetaminophen	Tylenol #3 and #4
Morphine	Kadian, MS Contin
Dilaudid	Hydromorphone HCL
Meperidine	Demerol
Cough medicines with Opioids	Hycodan, Robitussin AC, Tussionex

1. FDA Drug Safety Communication: FDA warns about serious risks and death when combining opioid pain or cough medicines with benzodiazepines; requires its strongest warning. https://www.fda.gov/Drugs/DrugSafety/ucm518473.htm?source=govdelivery&utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery
 2. Ibid.