

Benzodiazepines (and related drugs) for flying and travel anxiety

Information for patients

As of February 2025 Cairn Medical Practice will no longer be issuing medications for patients with a fear of travel or flying. Diazepam in the UK is a class C/Schedule IV controlled drug. The following guideline outlines why we have taken this decision as a practice, and explains the issues around flying and why we no longer prescribe such medications for this purpose.

According to the prescribing guidelines for doctors (British National Formulary) Diazepam is contraindicated (not allowed) for treating phobias. It also states that using benzodiazepines to treat 'short term mild anxiety' is 'inappropriate'.

Risk in Emergency

Diazepam is a sedative drug, which means using it can make you feel relaxed and drowsy. Although emergencies on a plane are rare, these drugs can cause reduced awareness and reaction times, which could pose a significant risk in the event of an emergency on board or at the airport.

Risk of Blood Clots

As mentioned the use of sedative drugs can make you feel drowsy and as a result, you may fall asleep. This results in you moving around less on a plane and can predispose patients to blood clots (Deep Vein Thrombosis) in the leg or even the lungs. Blood clots can sometimes prove fatal. This risk is even greater if your flight is longer than 4 hours.

Other risks

Despite the fact this medication is a sedative, some people find it can make them feel more agitated and the response to the medication can be unpredictable. They can also cause a patient to become disinhibited and make you behave in a way that you would not normally behave. This may pose a risk for you and also could be a risk for other passengers on the plane. A similar effect is often seen with alcohol – this has led to many people being removed from flights and getting into trouble with the law.

Illegal in some countries

Diazepam or similar controlled drugs are illegal in a number of countries, which means carrying these medications may lead to issues with the airport service or the police. It is important to declare all medical conditions and medications that you take to your travel insurance company. If you don't then there is a risk that your insurance policy will not be valid should anything happen.

Flight anxiety does not come under the remit of our General Medical Services as defined in the GP contract, so we are not obliged to prescribe this for patients. Patients who wish to use these drugs for flight anxiety are advised to consult with a private medical service.

Below are some useful websites for flight anxiety and various courses to help:

- SOAR – Fear of flying course : <http://thefearofflying.com/programs/soar-fear-of-flying-courses/>
- Easyjet – Fearless Flyer : www.fearlessflyer.easyjet.com
- British Airways – Flying with confidence : www.britishairways.com/content/information/travel-assistance/flying-with-confidence
- Flying without Fear : www.flyingwithoutfear.com