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[Review](#) [Am J Med.](#) 1990 Mar 2;88(3A):25S-28S. doi: 10.1016/0002-9343(90)90282-i.

Benzodiazepines, breathing, and sleep

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Abstract

The benzodiazepines are sedative hypnotic drugs, i.e., central nervous system depressant drugs, that may adversely affect the control of ventilation during sleep. Prescription of these drugs may worsen sleep-related breathing disorders, especially in patients with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease or cardiac failure. The most frequent users of sedative hypnotics are the polymorbid elderly with a secondary complaint of insomnia. **Although the benzodiazepines may reduce sleep fragmentation, their long-term use may also cause health problems, such as complete obstructive sleep apnea in heavy snorers or short repetitive central sleep apnea in patients with recent myocardial infarction.** Since drugs of this class vary in their effects, it is crucial to note the action of a given benzodiazepine on the control of vital functions during sleep.

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