



Tips for healthy aging and medication use:

- Talk with your doctor or pharmacist about the risks of your medications.
- Do not stop taking your medications without talking with your doctor.
- Ask about safer alternatives, especially for pain.
- Take medication only as instructed by your doctor.
- Avoid drinking alcohol when taking medications.
- Avoid driving until you know how the medicine will affect you.



Resources

VT Helplink
802-565-LINK
vthelplink.org



Medical emergencies: Dial 9-1-1

Vermont Area Agencies on Aging
Senior Help: (800) 642-5119

Support and Services at Home (SASH)
(802) 863-2224

VNAs of Vermont
(855) 484-3862

Medication disposal
Dial 2-1-1 to find locations in your community
For more info, locations, and free mail-back envelopes: healthvermont.gov/DoYourPart

Prescription opioids: What you need to know
healthvermont.gov/RxAware

Aging & Taking Opioids & Benzodiazepines: What you should know



Department of Health
Division of Substance Use Programs
108 Cherry St. • Burlington, VT 05402
(800) 464-4343 • (802) 651-1550
healthvermont.gov

Department of Disabilities,
Aging & Independent Living
HC2 So., 280 State Dr. • Waterbury, VT 05671
(802) 241-0294
dail.vermont.gov



How does taking both opioids and benzodiazepines affect you as you age?

Aging makes your body more sensitive to medications.

Aging makes it harder for your body to process medications. This means that it takes less to create a risk of a medical emergency, such as an overdose or other harmful effects.

Opioids and benzodiazepines can have health risks that increase when they are taken together.

What are opioids?

Opioids are powerful medicines that may be prescribed by your doctor to manage pain. Common opioid pain medicines are hydrocodone (Vicodin®) and oxycodone (Percocet®, Oxycontin®).

What are benzodiazepines?

Benzodiazepines (benzos) are also powerful medicines that may be prescribed by your doctor to manage insomnia, seizures or anxiety. Common benzos are alprazolam (Xanax®), clonazepam (Klonopin®), lorazepam (Ativan®) and diazepam (Valium®).

Increased risk of medical emergency from mixing opioids & benzos

Taking opioids and benzodiazepines together, even for a short time, can lead to:

- Extreme sleepiness
- Confusion or memory loss
- Slow or difficult breathing
- Loss of consciousness
- Death

Tell your doctor if you have been prescribed both opioids and benzodiazepines.

Your doctor may decide to limit prescribing both at the same time or recommend alternatives, and will help make a plan that effectively manages your conditions.

Your doctor may have you take both if other options are not a good fit for you. Your doctor may adjust the dosage and will monitor you closely.

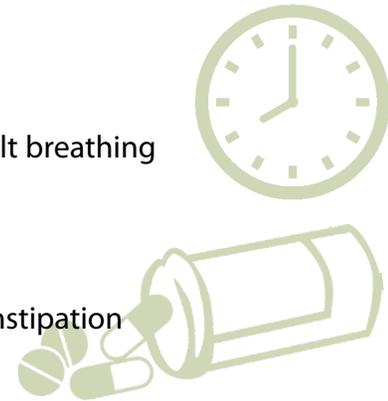
Do not suddenly stop taking your medications without talking with your doctor.

Talk to your doctor about your medications. Ask:

- How much should I take and when should I take it?
- Can my medications be taken at the same time?
- Can my medications be taken with alcohol?
- Should I have the overdose reversal medication naloxone (Narcan®) on hand and how do I use it?

Signs of a medical emergency:

- Loss of consciousness
- Drowsiness
- Dizziness
- Slow or difficult breathing
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Prolonged constipation
- Weakness



Call 9-1-1 immediately if you think you or someone else is experiencing a medical emergency.

For more information, contact any of the resources on the back of this brochure.