

Overview

Medicines are important and useful for treating and preventing a wide range of physical and mental illnesses. When taken as recommended then they can be useful and safe and should not be stopped abruptly. Discuss any concerns with your healthcare professionals.

However, it is recognised that certain combinations of medicines can be more risky than others, especially when taken outside of recommended dosing from a prescriber or pharmacy i.e. an overdose.

Overdoses can be both intentional as self-harm or unintentional/accidental. Unintentional overdoses occur for many reasons such as not understanding what you are taking, not realising the combination is dangerous especially when using someone else's medicines or those brought in a shop/community pharmacy.

This leaflet has been developed by Derbyshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust to support patients and carers to keep themselves safe when taking medicines.

DO NOT STOP TAKING ANY PRESCRIBED MEDICINE - DISCUSS ANY CONCERNS WITH YOUR GP OR PHARMACIST.

CALL 999/111 IF YOU ARE WORRIED ABOUT ANY TYPE OF OVERDOSE HAVING OCCURED OR FEEL SUDDENLY UNWELL.

Specific Medicines

Some medicines are considered to be more risky when not taken as recommended, especially when more is taken than prescribed i.e. overdose, or when used in combination due to additive effects

Benzodiazepines

These include diazepam, lorazepam, temazepam and nitrazepam.

These drugs are used to help with anxiety and sleep disorders.

Benzodiazepines should only be used for short-periods. Use for longer periods can lead to the medicine not working as well and difficulty stopping.

Large doses of benzodiazepines, especially when in combination with opioids and/or alcohol, are particularly dangerous and can slow your breathing rate. They can be fatal in overdoses.

Gabapentinoids (Pregabalin and gabapentin)

Gabapentinoids are used to treat pain and epilepsy. Pregabalin is also used to treat anxiety.

Pregabalin at higher doses, especially when in combination with alcohol and/or opioids, it can slow your breathing rate. It can be fatal in overdoses.

Antidepressants

This is a large group of medicines and includes SSRIs (i.e. sertraline, citalopram, fluoxetine), mirtazapine, venlafaxine, tricyclic's (i.e. imipramine, clomipramine, amitriptyline) and others.

Antidepressants are used to treat depression and low mood, anxiety and pain.

Some antidepressants can be damaging to the heart. Those medicines where the risk is higher and for patients with existing heart problems, the prescriber will make sure extra checks are done before starting and during to keep you safe. However, when taken in large doses the effect on the heart can be very serious.

Opioids

These include morphine, oxycodone, fentanyl and codeine. They also include methadone and buprenorphine and illicit's such as heroin.

Opioids are used to treat pain but also in substance misuse.

Large doses, especially in combination with alcohol and/or benzodiazepines, can make you very sleepy and slow your breathing rate. They can be fatal in overdoses.

For more information about your mental health visit [Mental health – NHS](https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/) (<https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/>)

For more information about individual mental health medicines visit <https://www.nhs.uk/medicines/> or <https://www.choiceandmedication.org/derbyshcft>