

## The Most Basic Basics of Minor Tranquilizer Medicines

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These medicines are prescribed to help patients deal with frequent feelings of worry or panic, which are usually termed “anxiety disorders”. Many of the symptoms caused by these feelings, which include fear, rapid heartbeat, racing thoughts with difficulty concentrating, sweating, and trembling, are due to triggering of the “flight or fright” bodily response when it is not justified or helpful. When this happens, your body releases adrenalin into your blood stream to help deal with the perceived threat, leading to the distressing symptoms. Minor tranquilizers work mainly by counteracting these adrenalin effects. They have a calming effect on the mind and body which can be very helpful. However, they are notoriously difficult to use correctly, and problems with them becoming habit forming and even addicting are encountered all too often. These medicines are members of the family of medicines which include Valium, Ativan (lorazepam), Xanax (alprazolam) and others.

When anxiety symptoms occur often over the long run, the preferred approach is to control the symptoms with a daily antidepressant, counseling, or a combination of the two, with the tranquilizer used as seldom and in as small an amount as is necessary. Here are the advantages and disadvantages of these medicines:

### Advantages:

- They work quite well to calm a person. In fact, they work so well that the tendency is for people to use the medicine to cancel out the symptoms, and never get around to dealing with the issues which cause them!
- They are inexpensive;
- They work right away; there is no waiting period of several weeks before they begin to work, as is the case with antidepressants.

### Disadvantages:

- People vary in how sensitive they are to these medicines; it's easy to take a higher dose than is needed, which results in drowsiness, decreased alertness (no driving after taking), and difficulty with memory and concentration. Not good side effects for University students!
- Taking the same dose for a while leads to tolerance; it soon takes higher doses to get the same effect; stopping them abruptly can cause serious withdrawal symptoms.
- Some people become dependent on the medicine, and feel that they simply cannot deal with stress without it;
- Some people become addicted, and cannot control their use of the medicine. They then use it inappropriately, use too much, can lie or steal to get more, etc.
- They can be dangerous or even life-threatening if combined with other substances which cause drowsiness, including alcohol.
- They are commonly abused (used to get “high”), and even stolen from patients, especially amongst the age group into which University students fall.

More information: <http://www.nami.org/Learn-More/Treatment/Mental-Health-Medications>