6.5: Antianxiety Medications

Antianxiety medications help reduce the symptoms of anxiety, panic attacks, or extreme fear and worry. The most common class of antianxiety medications is benzodiazepines. Benzodiazepines are used to treat generalized anxiety disorder, although SSRIs or other antidepressants are typically used to treat panic disorder or social phobia (i.e., social anxiety disorder). Beta-blockers and buspirone may also be prescribed for anxiety.¹

Benzodiazepines

Benzodiazepines are used to treat anxiety and are also used for their sedation and anticonvulsant effects because they bind to GABA receptors and stimulate the effects of GABA (an inhibitory neurotransmitter). Benzodiazepines include clonazepam, alprazolam, and lorazepam. Benzodiazepines are a Schedule IV controlled substance because they have a potential for misuse and can cause dependence. Short-acting benzodiazepines (such as lorazepam) and beta-blockers are used to treat the short-term symptoms of anxiety. Lorazepam is available for oral, intramuscular, or intravenous routes of administration.²

Beta-Blockers

Beta-blockers (such as propranolol) block sympathetic nervous system stimulation of Beta-1 receptors. They may be prescribed to manage the physical symptoms of anxiety (such as trembling, rapid heartbeat, and sweating) for a short period of time or used “as needed” to reduce acute physical symptoms.³

Read additional information about medications used to treat anxiety in the “Treatments for Anxiety” section of the “Anxiety Disorders” chapter.

2. This work is a derivative of DailyMed by U.S. National Library of Medicine and is available in the Public Domain.