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Effectiveness and safety of benzodiazepines.

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Benzodiazepines have been used to treat a wide variety of disorders, including generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder, sleep disorders, somatopsychic disorders, and depression. Concerns regarding physiologic dependence, withdrawal, and abuse potential with benzodiazepines prompted the development of strict guidelines for the use of these agents. Studies have shown that the risk of physiologic dependence increases with factors such as the dose of the benzodiazepine used and the duration of treatment. Restrictions involving benzodiazepines have led to the substitution of alternative medicines that may have decreased efficacy and greater safety concerns. There is a need for a more balanced assessment of the benefits and risks associated with benzodiazepine use to ensure that patients who would truly benefit from these agents are not denied appropriate treatment.

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