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Travel: Fear of Flying

Reasons why benzodiazepines(BDZs) are no longer prescribed for fear of flying

- The use of any sort of CNS depressant during a flight could put the passenger at significant risk of not being able to act in a manner which could save their life in the event of a safety critical scenario.
- The use of any sort of CNS depressant has the potential to increase the risk of a DVT (deep vein thrombosis). These drugs can induce non-REM sleep which tends to be a type where there is less movement in sleep therefore increasing the risk of sitting without moving for more than 4 hours (the length of time which has been shown to increase the risk of developing a DVT).
- A paradoxical increase in aggression has been reported by some patients taking BDZs and this therefore has the potential to put other occupants of the aircraft at risk.
- BDZs are contra-indicated for phobias.
- In some countries it is illegal to import these drugs and so the patient will need a different strategy for the homeward-bound journey and/or any subsequent legs of the journey.
- NICE guidelines suggest that medication should not be used for mild and/or self-limited mental health disorders. In more significant anxiety-related states, BDZs should never be prescribed. BDZs are only advised for short term use for a crisis in generalised anxiety disorder - if a patient is having a GAD (generalised anxiety disorder) crisis they are not fit to fly. Fear of flying in isolation is not GAD.