

Benzodiazepines and Lactation



It may be safe to nurse your baby while you're taking oxazepam, clobazam or lorazepam that comes from a pharmacy.

While you're taking other types of benzodiazepines, doses that make you high, or pills that aren't from a pharmacy, it isn't safe to chest/breastfeed.

What are benzodiazepines?

Benzodiazepines like Valium (diazepam), Xanax (alprazolam), Klonopin (clonazepam) and Ativan (lorazepam) are “downers”. They slow down your breathing, heart rate and the messages between your brain and body. Taking benzodiazepines with other downers like opioids or alcohol could cause you to have an accidental overdose.

Can benzos enter human milk?

Yes. If you take benzodiazepines, your milk will have benzodiazepines in it.

The amount that is in your milk depends on how much you take, which benzodiazepines you take and the amount of time that has passed since taking it.

About prescribed benzodiazepine use

- Talk to your healthcare provider about which benzodiazepine you're taking and the amount you're taking when deciding if chest/breastfeeding is right for you and your baby.

If you occasionally take benzodiazepines that aren't prescribed or use them again after stopping

Before taking benzos:

- Plan for feeding your baby. Pump and store your milk, buy infant formula, or buy donor milk.

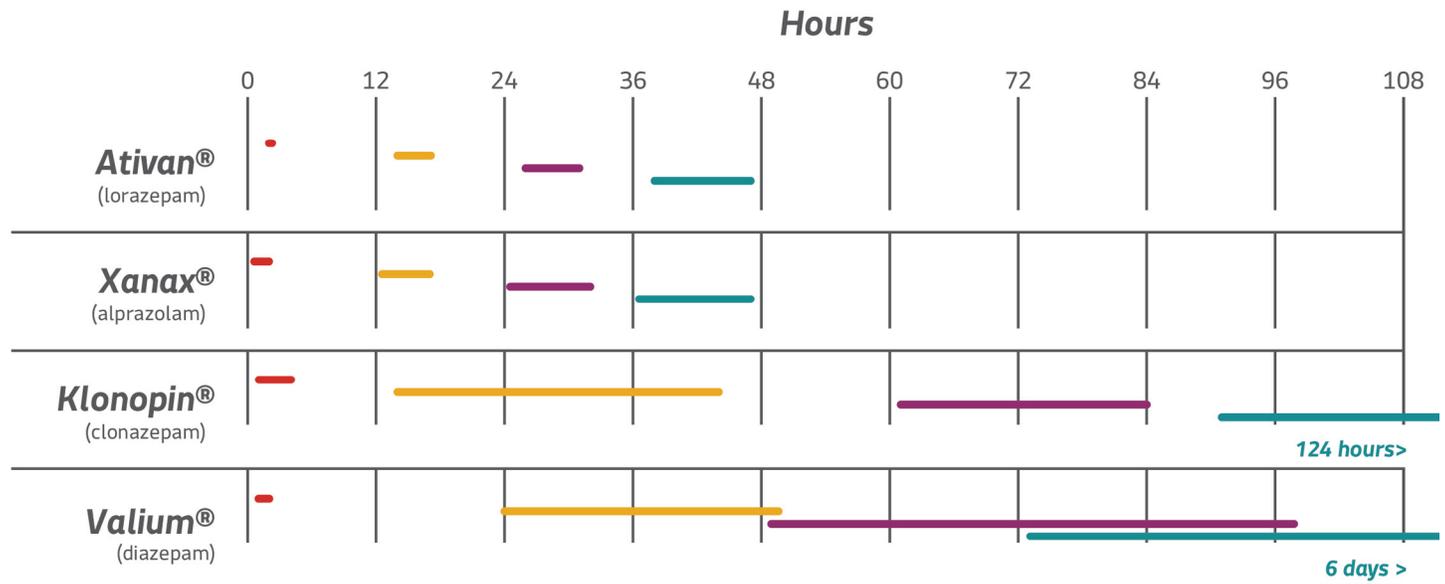
After taking benzos:

- You can feed your baby, infant formula, donor milk, or milk you pumped before taking benzodiazepines.
- You can pump for comfort and then discard your milk until your milk is free of benzodiazepines.
- Pumping as often as you usually feed your baby is a good way to maintain your milk supply.

How long should you pump and discard your milk before chest/breastfeeding again?

- There isn't a clear amount of time for how long you should pump and discard your milk if you're taking benzodiazepines.
- Pump and discard your milk for at least 2-4 hours after taking benzodiazepines. It's probably better to wait longer.

Benzo levels in your milk and body after taking them:



Key

- Benzo level highest after use
- Benzo levels 1/2 of highest level after use
- Benzo levels 1/4 of their highest level after use
- Benzo levels at 1/8 of their highest level after use



Keeping you and your baby healthy and safe

- Take a multivitamin with iodine and eat brightly colored fruits and vegetables to increase the nutrition in your milk.
- Talk to your baby's healthcare provider if your baby is more sleepy than usual, has difficulty eating or is constipated.
- Get a babysitter for the time you are intoxicated.
- Don't drive while you're under the influence of benzodiazepines.
- Avoid sleeping with your baby after taking benzodiazepines. You are at a higher risk of accidentally suffocating your baby. The safest sleep arrangement is to share the same room with your baby in their own crib.
- You can reduce the negative effects on your baby by taking lower amounts of benzodiazepines, taking benzodiazepines less often, and waiting until your milk doesn't have benzodiazepines in it to nurse your baby.
- Store benzodiazepines and substances securely. This is especially important if toddlers or other children are in the house.
 - **If you think your baby has swallowed benzodiazepines**, call Poison Control at 800-222-1222.
 - **Call 911** if your baby has slow breathing, stops breathing, is difficult to wake, has skin or lips that look blue, is lethargic, too sleepy, or has vomiting and/or diarrhea that won't stop.

How benzodiazepines may affect an infant

Benzodiazepines can make infants sleepy, difficult to wake up, have difficulty eating, have neonatal jaundice, and be less alert and interactive. About 2% of infants fed human milk with benzodiazepines in it will have some of these symptoms. It isn't safe to nurse your baby if you are taking more than one benzodiazepine, high doses of benzodiazepines or are taking benzodiazepines with alcohol, opioids or another downer.

Some infants have withdrawal symptoms if their chest/breastfeeding parent stops taking benzodiazepines or stops nursing them. Symptoms to watch for are irritability, restlessness and crying more than usual. Seek medical care if your baby isn't eating, sleeping or consolable. If you take benzodiazepines, try to reduce how much you take before stopping them completely.

If I take benzodiazepines while I'm pregnant, will my baby have withdrawal symptoms after they're born?

If you take opioids while you're pregnant, your baby might have withdrawal symptoms after they're born. Your baby will also need to stay in the hospital for a few extra days.

When you give birth, the best type of care for you and your baby is called Eat, Sleep and Console. This care includes:

- You and your baby staying in the same room together.
- Keeping the room quiet with the light dim.
- Swaddling and holding your baby.
- Nursing your baby or holding them skin-to-skin while they bottle feed.

Not all hospitals offer Eat, Sleep and Console. To find out if the hospital you're planning to deliver at offers Eat, Sleep and Console you can:

- Ask your prenatal care provider if the hospital you want to deliver at offers Eat, Sleep and Console.
- You can call the hospital's main phone number and ask the operator for the maternity department (this is sometimes called the 'postpartum', 'antepartum' or 'mother baby' floors/units). Any of the nurses working should know if they offer Eat, Sleep and Console.
- If you can, choose to deliver at a hospital that offers Eat, Sleep and Console. That is the best type of care for you and your baby.

Reducing your benzodiazepine use

Stopping benzodiazepine use abruptly can be dangerous and difficult. Talk to your health care provider or call the [Washington Recovery Help Line](#) at 866-789-1511 for support or information about how to quit or reduce your use.

People use different terms to describe their body parts. Some transgender and non-binary birth parents use "chest" instead of "breasts." In this document, we use breastfeeding and chestfeeding as interchangeable terms. Lactation is a biological process where your body makes milk to feed babies.