

3 TEMAZEPAM MISUSE

This leaflet is for those using temazepam without being under the care of a doctor

What is Temazepam?

Temazepam, known variously as Tems, Temazzies, Eggs, Jellies, Norries (from trade name Normison), Rugby Balls, etc, is a sedative drug from the benzodiazepine family. Similar drugs include Valium, Librium, Ativan and Mogadon. They are usually prescribed by a doctor for insomnia and sometimes anxiety. Some people also use them to get high, or to ease the come-down from other drugs like ecstasy, speed or cocaine.

What are the effects of temazepam?

Benzodiazepines like temazepam reduce anxiety, relax muscular tension and make you sleepy. The effects of higher doses are similar to alcohol so people behave in ways that they wouldn't if they were not under the influence of the drug.

- Inhibitions are reduced – users may become overly affectionate or amorous.
- Behaviour is exaggerated – users may become talkative and over-excited, sometimes even hostile and aggressive.
- Judgment is impaired – users gain a false sense of confidence.
- Tolerance develops quite quickly – users may be tempted to increase doses to dangerous levels.

What is the law on temazepam?

Benzodiazepines are controlled by the Misuse of Drugs Act (in class C, the least heavily penalised). However, even if you don't have a prescription, you cannot be prosecuted for possessing temazepam in the original medicinal form. It is an offence to possess benzodiazepines if they are not in their original form (such as if they have been prepared for injection) and this carries a maximum penalty of two years' imprisonment. The maximum penalty for supplying benzodiazepines is five years' imprisonment.

What are the risks?

Inability to assess the risk of a situation makes those misusing downers like temazepam highly vulnerable while under the influence of the drug. They might walk out into traffic, or go shoplifting believing they look inconspicuous, though in reality their exaggerated gestures make them appear highly suspicious.

When inhibitions are reduced, some people may be more likely to have unprotected sex. This can result in unwanted pregnancy or sexually transmitted diseases like gonorrhoea, hepatitis or HIV, the virus that causes AIDS.

Benzodiazepines like temazepam can also cause dependence if taken regularly. When you stop using temazepam, you may suffer withdrawal symptoms. These can include sleeplessness, anxiety, panic attacks, loss of appetite, feeling sick, tremors and, in extreme cases, hallucinations. These symptoms can last for weeks or even months – far longer than say for heroin. Abrupt withdrawal from high doses may cause convulsions similar to epileptic fits, so anybody wishing to stop using the drug should seek medical advice.

High doses of benzodiazepines can cause overdose, especially if you mix them with opiate drugs like heroin or methadone, or if you drink alcohol. Another risk is that users can vomit while asleep and choke on the vomit. Users should avoid taking temazepam when alone, and never leave a friend who is under the influence until they know the effects have worn off.

Some people take temazepam by injection into a vein. This is extremely dangerous. If you miss the vein and inject under the skin, temazepam will cause abscesses or ulcers. Injecting temazepam tablets has caused such bad injuries that the manufacturers developed gel-filled capsules to stop people injecting. But people carried on just the same, risking perhaps even worse injuries. Even if you hit the vein, the gelatine solution in the capsules can resolidify in the vein, causing thrombosis and collapsed veins. If you inject temazepam into an artery, this blockage may cause gangrene, leading to the loss of a hand, a foot, even an arm or a leg.

If you inject with other people, the effects of the drug may make you careless or forgetful. This can result in needles and syringes being mixed up, increasing the possibility of becoming exposed to infections like hepatitis or HIV.

Because of the risk of fits, if you are pregnant, DO NOT come off temazepam abruptly. Withdrawal is best done under medical supervision. If you are still using at birth, there is a chance that the baby will have withdrawal symptoms and be difficult to settle for some while.

Points to remember

- Used in a social setting, temazepam (or other sedatives) may produce a volatile atmosphere, leading to aggression and violence.
- As with many drugs, use of temazepam can lower sexual inhibitions, possibly leading to sexual intercourse. Both men and women should be aware of the need to protect themselves and their partners from infections like HIV. One mistake could be fatal. Remember to always carry (and use) condoms.
- Benzodiazepines can be addictive. If you do use them, avoid using them on a regular basis.
- Injecting temazepam increases the risk of overdose and can lead to HIV infection, hepatitis, thrombosis, abscesses and gangrene.
- Never try to drive, operate machinery or engage in other dangerous activities while under the influence of temazepam (or any other drug).
- Mixing downers with alcohol or other drugs increases the risk of overdose. Never mix drugs. If somebody loses consciousness and cannot be aroused, lie the person on their side with the head turned to one side and call an ambulance immediately. When the ambulance arrives, tell the medics what drug the person has taken.
- Remember, the only way to avoid the risks is not to use the drug. If you decide to do so, be aware and take care.