

Policy on Diazepam for Flying (Fear of Flying or Sleep Aid)

Version control:

Version 1	Creation of Document	Woodbridge Hill Surgery	July 2025
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At Woodbridge Hill Surgery, we understand that flying can be an anxiety-provoking experience. However, in line with national clinical guidance and patient safety considerations, we generally **do not** prescribe diazepam (or similar medications) for air travel, including for fear of flying or to aid sleep during flights.

We kindly ask that patients do not contact the surgery to request such prescriptions. Safer, evidence-based alternatives are available through self-care and support services, which we encourage you to explore independently.

⊗ Key Reasons Diazepam Is Not Prescribed:

- **Safety Risk During Emergencies**
Diazepam slows reaction time and cognitive processing. In the event of an in-flight emergency, this may compromise your ability to respond, posing a risk to yourself and others.
 - **Increased Risk of Blood Clots (DVT)**
Diazepam reduces movement by inducing deep, non-REM sleep. On long-haul flights, this immobility can significantly increase the risk of blood clots, which can be life-threatening.
 - **Paradoxical Reactions**
Some people experience agitation, aggression, or confusion instead of sedation—posing potential risks during confined air travel.
 - **Interaction with Alcohol**
Mixing alcohol with benzodiazepines amplifies all associated risks and can be dangerous, especially in a pressurised environment.
 - **Guideline Restrictions**
The **British National Formulary (BNF)** advises against using benzodiazepines for phobias or short-term mild anxiety. Prescribing in these situations is considered clinically inappropriate and may expose the prescriber to legal risk.
 - **NICE Guidance**
NICE guidelines discourage the use of sedative medications for self-limiting mental health conditions. Even in more significant anxiety disorders, benzodiazepines are not recommended for routine use.
 - **Legal Restrictions Abroad**
Diazepam is a controlled drug. Carrying it—legally prescribed or not—may lead to seizure or prosecution in some countries, including parts of the Middle East and Asia.
 - **Workplace Drug Testing**
Diazepam can remain in the body for days and may be detectable on drug tests, potentially affecting your employment.
 - **Link to Dementia**
Long-term use of benzodiazepines has been associated with an increased risk of cognitive decline and dementia.
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✓ Self-Care and Alternatives

If flying causes significant anxiety, we recommend the following:

- **Fear of Flying Courses:** These are run by most major airlines and provide safe, effective strategies based on CBT principles.
- **Relaxation Techniques:** Breathing exercises, guided meditations, and visualisation techniques can help manage anticipatory anxiety.
- **NHS Talking Therapies:** Free, local psychological support services are available for those with persistent anxiety that affects daily life.

Thank you for your understanding and for helping us prioritise safe and appropriate care.

This policy is in line with current national and local NHS guidance and aims to ensure safe, effective, and legally compliant care for all our patients.