

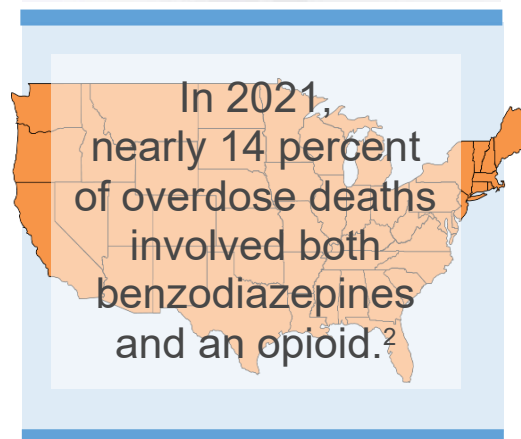
High-Risk Medications

Opioids: Strong Warnings Against Combining Opioids for Pain With Cough Medicines or Benzodiazepines

You know that opioids are used to treat pain while benzodiazepines are used to treat anxiety, insomnia, and seizures. But did you know that some prescription cough syrups also contain opioids? What happens when a patient who routinely takes Ativan for anxiety and also is taking “the cough syrup the doctor prescribed?” If that cough syrup has codeine in it, the results could be disastrous and even life threatening because it is combining an opioid and benzodiazepine. This is so serious that the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) now requires its strongest warning, called a Boxed Warning—a bold, black-bordered notice at the top of the packaging—to be used for opioids and benzodiazepines.¹

So, what can you do about this?

You may not quickly recognize the names of the most commonly prescribed opioids and benzodiazepines. To assist you, use the pocket card list below and distribute it to your staff members. When medication reconciliation or medication administration is occurring, healthcare providers should be aware of the listed medications and verify that the two drugs are needed. If the prescriber verifies both the opioid and benzodiazepine are to be given, then provide education to the patient and his or her family member about the risks of respiratory depression and sedation if opioids are used with benzodiazepines, alcohol, or other central nervous system (CNS) depressants (e.g., illicit or recreational drugs).



Generic Name	Brand Name(s)
Benzodiazepines	
Commonly Used for Anxiety	
Alprazolam	Xanax, Xanax XR
Chlordiazepoxide	Librium, Librax
Clonazepam	Klonopin
Diazepam	Valium, Diastat
Lorazepam	Ativan
Oxazepam	<i>generic only</i>
Commonly Used as Sleeping Aids	
Flurazepam	Dalmane
Temazepam	Restoril
Triazolam	Halcion

Generic Name	Brand Name(s)
Opioids	
Codeine with acetaminophen	Tylenol #3 and #4
Dilaudid	Hydromorphone HCL
Fentanyl	Duragesic, Sublimaze, Actiq, Abstral, Subsys, Lazanda, Onsolis
Hydrocodone with acetaminophen	Vicodin, Lortab, Norco, Lorcet
Meperidine	Demerol
Morphine	Kadian, MS Contin
Oxycodone with acetaminophen	Percocet
Oxycodone with aspirin	Percodan
Oxycodone Hydrochloride (HCL)	OxyContin
Oxymorphone	Opana, Opana ER
Tramadol	Ultram, Ultram ER, Conzip
Cough Medicines with Opioids	Hycodan, Robitussin AC, Tussionex

HSAG is the West Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) Quality Innovation Network-Quality Improvement Organization (QIN-QIO) Region 7.

1. FDA Drug Safety Communication: FDA requiring Boxed Warning updated to improve safe use of benzodiazepine drug class. Available at: <https://www.fda.gov/drugs/drug-safety-and-availability/fda-requiring-boxed-warning-updated-improve-safe-use-benzodiazepine-drug-class>. Accessed on: June 23, 2026
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center on Health Statistics. Released January 2023. Available at: <https://www.drugabuse.gov/drug-topics/opioids/benzodiazepines-opioids>. Accessed on: June 23, 2026