

Before starting medicines associated with dependence or withdrawal symptoms

This is a summary of recommendations 1.3.1 to 1.3.5 in the [NICE guideline on medicines associated with dependence or withdrawal symptoms](#). It is intended to support prescribers before starting treatment with an opioid, benzodiazepine, gabapentinoid, Z-drug or antidepressant. It is not an exhaustive list but should supplement standard prescribing practice. The guideline includes more detailed information for prescribers on supporting people (section 1.1) and making decisions (section 1.2) using a collaborative and person-centred approach.

Give verbal and written information about the medicine

Before starting an opioid, benzodiazepine, gabapentinoid, Z-drug or antidepressant, discuss:

- All other suitable management options, including non-pharmacological approaches, and ensure that they have been offered
- Potential side effects and if they are likely to be temporary or permanent and improve or worsen over time
- Any implications if pregnant or planning pregnancy
- Possible difficulties with stopping the medicine and how to manage this
- That missing doses may lead to symptoms of withdrawal
- How to store their medicine safely
- Options if the medicine does not work

For an opioid, benzodiazepine, gabapentinoid or Z-drug, also discuss:

- That dependence is common with these medicines but not a reason to avoid them
- The potential for developing problems associated with dependence and risk factors (such as mental health problems, history of drug misuse, taking an opioid with a benzodiazepine)
- Symptoms that suggest the development of problems associated with dependence and the importance of telling people close to them about the symptoms

For an antidepressant or gabapentinoid, also discuss:

- That any benefits may occur slowly and side effects might be experienced first, but many side effects ease over time

Discuss and agree a medicines management plan

Include in the medicines management plan:

- What the medicine has been prescribed for
- Intended outcomes of treatment and how these might be assessed
- Starting dose and intervals between dose adjustments or titrations
- Who to contact if problems occur
- How long the medicine will take to work and how long they might be taking it for
- Duration of each prescription that will be issued
- Risks of taking more than the prescribed dose
- Symptoms of an overdose and what they should do if this happens
- Plans for reviewing the medicine, including when, where and by whom their next review will be done