

Kittoch Medical Practice

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PATIENTS REQUESTING SEDATIVE MEDICATION FOR FLYING

Dear Patients,

Fear of flying is considered one of the top three phobias in the adult population. It is recognised that patients often approach their GP to seek benzodiazepines, e.g diazepam/valium, ahead of flying but these are not licensed to treat those with a fear of flying. Kittoch Surgery has taken the decision not to prescribe diazepam in cases where there is a fear of flying. There are a number of reasons for this that are set out below:

- Diazepam is a sedative, which means it makes you sleepy and more relaxed. If there is an emergency during the flight it may impair your ability to concentrate, follow instructions and react to the situation. This could have serious safety consequences for you and those around you.
- Sedative drugs can make you fall asleep, however when you do sleep it is an unnatural non-REM sleep. This means you won't move around as much as during natural sleep. This can cause you to be at increased risk of developing a blood clot (DVT) in the leg or even the lung. Blood clots are very dangerous and can even prove fatal. This risk is even greater if your flight is greater than 4 hours.
- Whilst most people find benzodiazepines like diazepam sedating, a small number of people experience the opposite effect and may become aggressive. Benzodiazepines can also cause disinhibition and lead you to behave in a way that you would not normally. This could impact on your safety as well as that of other passengers and could also get you into trouble with the police.
- According to the national prescribing guidelines that doctors follow (the British National Formulary, or BNF) benzodiazepines are not allowed to be prescribed in cases of phobia. Thus, your doctor would be taking a significant legal risk by prescribing diazepam for fear of flying as it is going against these guidelines. Benzodiazepines are only licensed short term for a crisis in generalised anxiety. If this is the case, you should be getting proper care and support for your mental health and not going on a flight.
- Diazepam and similar drugs are illegal in a number of countries. They may be confiscated, or you may find yourself in trouble with the police.
- Diazepam stays in your system for quite a while. If your job requires you to submit to random drug testing, you may fail this having taken diazepam.

We appreciate that fear of flying is very real and very frightening. A much better approach is to tackle this with a Fear of Flying – these are provided by multiple airlines