

# Benzodiazepines increase mortality in persons with Alzheimer's disease

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Benzodiazepine and related drug use is associated with a 40 percent increase in mortality among persons with Alzheimer's disease, according to a new study from the University of Eastern Finland. The findings were published in the International Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry.

The study found that the risk of death was increased right from the initiation of [benzodiazepine](#) and related drug use. The increased risk of death may result from the adverse events of these drugs, including fall-related injuries, such as hip fractures, as well as pneumonia and stroke.

The study was based on the register-based MEDALZ (Medication Use and Alzheimer's Disease) cohort, which includes all persons diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease in Finland during 2005-2011. Persons who had used benzodiazepines and related drugs previously were excluded from this study, and therefore, the study population consisted of 10,380 new users of these drugs. They were compared with 20,760 persons who did not use these drugs.

Although several treatment guidelines state that non-pharmacological options are the first-line treatment of anxiety, agitation and insomnia in persons with dementia, benzodiazepines and related drugs are frequently used in the treatment of these symptoms. If benzodiazepine and related drug use is necessary, these drugs are recommended for short-term use only. These new results encourage more consideration for benzodiazepine and related drug use in persons with dementia.

**More information:** Laura Saarelainen et al. Risk of death associated with new benzodiazepine use among persons with Alzheimer disease: A matched cohort study, *International Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry* (2017). [DOI: 10.1002/gps.4821](https://doi.org/10.1002/gps.4821)

Provided by University of Eastern Finland

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