

# Opioid Tapering Flow Sheet

## START HERE

Consider opioid taper for patients with opioid MED > 90 mg/d or methadone > 30 mg/d, aberrant behaviors, significant behavioral/physical risks, lack of improvement in pain and function.

- 1 Frame the conversation around tapering as a safety issue.
- 2 Determine rate of taper based on degree of risk.
- 3 If multiple drugs involved, taper one at a time (e.g., start with opioids, follow with BZPs).
- 4 Set a date to begin and set a reasonable date for completion. Provide information to the patient and establish behavioral supports prior to instituting the taper. See OPG guidelines.

## OPIOID TAPER

### Opioids

Basic principle: For longer-acting drugs and a more stable patient, use slower taper. For shorter-acting drugs, less stable patient, use faster taper.

- 1 Use an MED calculator to help plan your tapering strategy. Methadone MED calculations increase exponentially as the dose increases, so methadone tapering is generally a slower process.
- 2 Long-acting opioid: Decrease total daily dose by 5–10% of initial dose per week.  
**Short-acting opioids:** Decrease total daily dose by 5–15% per week.
- 3 See patient frequently during process and stress behavioral supports. Consider UDS, pill counts, and PDMP to help determine adherence.
- 4 After ¼ to ½ of the dose has been reached, with a cooperative patient, you can slow the process down.
- 5 Consider adjuvant medications: antidepressants, gabapentin, NSAIDs, clonidine, anti-nausea, anti-diarrhea agents.

### MED for Selected Opioids

Opioid	Approximate Equianalgesic Dose (oral and transdermal)
Morphine (reference)	30mg
Codeine	200mg
Fentanyl transdermal	12.5mcg/hr
Hydrocodone	30mg
Hydromorphone	7.5mg
Methadone Chronic	4mg
Oxycodone	20mg
Oxymorphone	10mg
Tapentadol	75mg
Tramadol	300mg

**Morphine Equivalent Dosing (MED) Calculator:**  
[agencymeddirectors.wa.gov/mobile.html](http://agencymeddirectors.wa.gov/mobile.html)

# Benzodiazepine Tapering Flow Sheet

## START HERE

Consider benzodiazepine taper for patients with aberrant behaviors, behavioral risk factors, impairment, or concurrent opioid use.

- 1 Frame the conversation around tapering as a safety issue.
- 2 Determine rate of taper based on degree of risk.
- 3 If multiple drugs are involved, taper one at a time (e.g., start with opioids, follow with BZPs).
- 4 Set a date to begin and a reasonable date for completion. Provide information to the patient and establish behavioral supports prior to instituting the taper. See OPG guidelines.

## BENZODIAZEPINE TAPER

Basic principle: Expect anxiety, insomnia, and resistance. Patient education and support will be critical. Risk of seizures with abrupt withdrawal increases with higher doses. The slower the taper, the better tolerated.

### SLOW TAPER

- 1 Calculate total daily dose. Switch from short-acting agent (alprazolam, lorazepam) to longer-acting agent (diazepam, clonazepam, chlordiazepoxide, or phenobarbital). Upon initiation of taper, reduce the calculated dose by 25–50% to adjust for possible metabolic variance.
- 2 Schedule first follow-up visit two to four days after initiating taper to determine if adjustment in initial calculated dose is needed.
- 3 Reduce the total daily dose by 5–10% per week in divided doses.
- 4 After  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the dose is reached, you can slow the taper with cooperative patient.
- 5 With cooperative patients who are having difficulty with this taper regimen, you can extend the total time of reduction to as much as six months.
- 6 Consider adjunctive agents to help with symptoms: trazodone, hydroxyzine, neuroleptics, anti-depressants, clonidine, and alpha-blocking agents.

### RAPID TAPER

- 1 Pre-medicate two weeks prior to taper with valproate 500mg BID or carbamazepine 200mg every AM and 400mg every HS. Continue this medication for four weeks post-benzodiazepines. Follow the usual safeguards (lab testing and blood levels) when prescribing these medications.
- 2 Utilize concomitant behavioral supports.
- 3 Discontinue current benzodiazepine treatment and switch to diazepam 2mg BID for two days, followed by 2mg every day for two days, then stop. For high doses, begin with 5mg BID for two days and then continue as described.
- 4 Use adjuvant medications as mentioned above for rebound anxiety and other symptoms.

### Benzodiazepine Equivalency Chart

Drug	Half-life (hrs)	Dose Equivalent
Chlordiazepoxide (Librium)	5–30 h	25mg
Diazepam (Valium)	20–50 h	10mg
Alprazolam (Xanax)	6–20 h	0.5mg
Clonazepam (Klonopin)	18–39 h	0.5mg
Lorazepam (Ativan)	10–20 h	1mg
Oxazepam (Serax)	3–21 h	15mg
Triazolam (Halcion)	1.6–5.5 h	0.5mg
Phenobarbital (barbituate)	53 – 118 h	30 mg