

Benzos and Opioids: When to Avoid Their Combination

Benzos raise the risk of an opioid overdose by 2–4 fold. The features below increase that risk further. When available, I've estimated the magnitude of the increase in parentheses.

Near-absolute contraindication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active prescription misuse • Active opioid, alcohol, or benzo/sedative use disorder • History of sedative overdose • Methadone use (7x)
Strong relative contraindication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • History of sedative, alcohol, or opioid use disorder (3x) • Borderline or antisocial personality disorder (2x) • Unstable psychiatric disorder (2x) • Respiratory disease (eg, COPD, sleep apnea), pregnancy, or systemic medical illness such as HIV (5x); organ failure (1.5x); and renal or hepatic impairment • Daily opioid dose \geq50 morphine milligram equivalents (2x) (see www.oregonpainguidance.org/opioidmedcalculator); long-acting opioids carry a higher risk than short-acting ones • Risk of falls or traffic accidents • Age \geq65

Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012. MMWR 2014;63(26):563–568; Dilokithornsakul P et al, J Pain 2016;17:436–443; Dowell D et al, JAMA 2016;315:1624–1645; Webster LR et al, Postgrad Med 2015;127:27–32.

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