



LENS

# Anxiety and the Prescribing of Benzodiazepines

© (Stockphoto.com/Juanmonino)



In 2008 in the United States, 75 million benzodiazepine prescriptions were written.

Anxiety is complex. It is experienced negatively as something we seek to reduce or eliminate. As human beings, we want to do this quickly and in a simple way. Taking a pill seems easy. We are supported in this decision by advertisements in which people are shown to be happy due to various kinds of psychotropic medications. Many of these ads contain phrases such as “ask your doctor,” which further promotes their use. However, there are also negative consequences in terms of addiction and overdoses to the use of these medications.

Benzodiazepine is a drug that is commonly used to treat anxiety and sleep problems (Olfson, King, & Schoenbaum, 2015). This psychotropic medication is one of the most commonly prescribed drugs in Western countries, including the United States and Canada. It was estimated that over 8% of the population of Canada used a benzodiazepine in 2006. During that same time, over 5.2% of U.S. adults (11 million) filled a prescription for a benzodiazepine. As can be seen from *Figure 8.5*, benzodiazepine use in the United States goes up with age and is used more by females than males. These gender differences are also seen in Europe and Canada. The increased use with age seems strange to researchers, since anxiety disorders show a decline

in the population with age. In older adults, long-term benzodiazepine use has been associated with impaired cognitive functioning, reduced mobility and driving skills, and increased risks of falls.

Although benzodiazepine has been shown to be effective in the treatment of anxiety, in 2011 there were 426,000 visits to emergency rooms related to the use of benzodiazepines. This is up from 272,000 visits in 2008. Often this was associated with the use of alcohol along with benzodiazepines.

(Continued)