

JENNY ROBINSON PERSONAL STORY:

Benzodiazepine Addiction

Hello, my name is Jennifer Robinson. I have been a very long-term user of Valium, 31 years to be exact. I was prescribed it by a doctor all those years ago to help me with the stress I was struggling with in my first teaching job with handicapped children. It worked for a couple of weeks, and then simply stopped working and turned into an addiction. As my addiction progressed, my health deteriorated and life became tougher on the pills. Despite this, I managed to travel a lot to Russia, Poland, and most of Europe. I just thought it was me, but looking back I was never very well on the pills, but I did function. I held down some wonderful jobs, went to college, and life was bearable until about four years ago.

After being strung out on repeat prescriptions of Valium for decades, I started drinking too much in the evenings, having a bottle of wine most nights, and I realised that I was starting to develop a dependency to alcohol. I didn't know why at the time as I had never had problems with alcohol before. I have since learnt that Benzos and alcohol use the same brain receptors and are cross-tolerant. I was basically topping myself up with 'liquid Valium' in the form of alcohol.

In the end, I got myself admitted to hospital to detox from alcohol; I wanted to stop before it turned into a serious problem. The day I was admitted was the worst day of my life. I was 'overdosed' on 100mg of Valium, supposedly to stop withdrawals from alcohol. This was totally unnecessary as I never drank in the day and could go days without a drink, without experiencing withdrawal symptoms. Benzodiazepines were my main addiction problem, much more so than alcohol.

I believe that the very high dose of diazepam I received in the detox increased my tolerance to benzodiazepines and my body started craving more and more of the drug. This sent me into withdrawal. After leaving detox, the suicidal thoughts started – also, the shaking, panic, loss of taste (or everything tasted of metal and cardboard), loss of the ability to communicate, loss of concentration, monophobia (the fear of being alone) and much more. I was housebound for a year. The panic was too bad to leave home. Not only was I trapped, but my dear husband, Ian, could go nowhere either.

After six months of this, I took what should have been a fatal overdose and said 'goodbye cruel world'. I woke up five days later in intensive care. I guess God didn't want me to die and kept me alive for a reason. I believe that reason is to warn others of the dangers of benzodiazepine addiction.

I tapered down my dosage over a year. When I came off, I was able to go out again and was able to travel to see my darling brother. He was then diagnosed with terminal cancer, and every day my sister and I would travel to care for him. He lived alone and died three months later.

I have now been off Valium for nearly five years off, and am slowly recovering. I guess it has taken so long because I was on them so long, at such a high dose. It has literally blown my brains out. However, I can now drive, do housework, eat again, socialise, and of late I work voluntarily in a psychiatric hospital and also helped to organise the village festival.

I am going for a meal with my friends soon, the first time in nearly four years. So I guess you could say I am getting there. My life has been hell on earth for the last few years, but I can see light at the end of the tunnel. I really don't want to frighten anyone, and it's probably because I used benzos for so long that has put me in this situation of long-lasting symptoms.

I am very angry about what's happened to me and I don't want to see anyone hurt as badly as I have been, so I am now on a mission to get help and services for people addicted to these vile and highly addictive drugs called benzodiazepines.