


Grief in Benzo Withdrawal

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As the world unfolded to the unknown of what would be in the days that followed my brother's passing associated with benzodiazepine (benzo) injury, I didn't know I would be transported to a time and place in my mind and heart so well preserved in love and purity. As he walked off this earth, the clouds that surrounded him lifted

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and all that remained was the essence of all his goodness. The only thing I could see were the beams of light breaking through the clouds, the cat tails in the marsh along the side of the road, and low sunrises and sunsets as if that's all that ever existed. Death is strange in that way. All that is grey is burned away and the vibrant colors of the soul remain. Grief does not only change people, the world around them changes too.

In benzo withdrawal, so much can be lost. Taking medication as prescribed to sleep or manage anxiety, a new normal is reached and the insidious side effects take hold, which can alter a person's personality and ability to cope overall as gaba receptors become down regulated. Unfortunately, when someone has been prescribed a benzodiazepine longer than 2-4 weeks, adaptations to the brain occurs and a dependency sets in. For some it has been documented as early as 1 week. Addiction is very different in the sense that it is a compulsion to use a substance in high amounts despite negative consequences. When someone has developed a physical tolerance to benzodiazepines and subsequently wants to stop taking them by their own volition or via a doctor's recommendation, withdrawal symptoms will set

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in due to those physical adaptations. Some of these withdrawal symptoms can cause seizures or even death.

Individuals in benzo withdrawal have much to grieve. The time that is lost, the loss of themselves, the loss of relationships, the loss of innocence and trust, and sometimes the loss of faith. In grief we all go through the steps and not necessarily in a linear way. These steps tend to be shock, denial, anger, bargaining, depression, testing, and acceptance.

We've all heard you never really get over it. Instead, you get through it, and that is true. You come out the other side changed, stronger but also softened at the same time. The people in withdrawal have to practice radical acceptance of every waking moment of symptoms for months and sometimes years on end. Symptoms like burning skin, nerve pain, chemical anxiety (cortisol surges), monophobia, agoraphobia, looping thoughts, anhedonia, tinnitus, heart palpitations, weakness, fatigue, and Postural Orthostatic Tachycardia Syndrome (POTS)-like symptoms.

Like everything in nature that is cyclical, these symptoms take their turns day after day in the healing that is non-linear. When one is healed,

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they have to make peace with what happened to them and continue radical acceptance and self-care. There are battle scars that can only be felt in the heart and mind of a benzo warrior.

A benzo withdrawal survivors will never forget that they survived the unimaginable. Protracted symptoms, tough, yet manageable are reminders that they made it through. Their grief becomes part of them and who they are, just as someone you lost becomes part of who you are. When you lose yourself in benzo withdrawal, you still carry yourself around with you and are never really gone.

My brother never fully believed that benzodiazepines had altered his personality and that he had a benzo injury. Thus, never believed that he would get better. Those who heal after and believe or know they have a benzo injury are fortunate in that they have a chance to hope. And, though they lose so much, they realize they have everything to gain simply because they are alive.

Lucid Lane is dedicated to empowering people with pain and substance use to live healthier and happier lives.

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You can find access to the Care center by downloading the VEST Care app and entering your organization code. Email us or talk to your HR department to get this code if you don't already have it.

If you have any questions about how VEST can help you improve your culture and provide your employees with the emotional resources they need through our Proactive-EAP, don't hesitate to contact us at (385) 205-6789 (tel:(385) 205-6789) or go@vesteap.com (mailto:go@vesteap.com).

We are here to help!

Disclaimer: VEST content is not therapy and is not designed to diagnose or treat any condition you may be experiencing. Please contact a medical or mental health professional for treatment that is specific to your needs.

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