What are tranquillisers?

There are two types of tranquillisers – ‘major’ (which are non-addictive antipsychotics) and ‘minor’ (which are relaxants that are addictive and liable to misuse).

Here we’re just talking about the ‘minor tranquillisers’. These tranquillisers can induce periods of calmness, relaxation and sleep and are used to treat anxiety and insomnia. They are prescription only medicines that can normally only be prescribed following a consultation with a doctor.

There are many different types of minor tranquillisers, but the most common are the group of drugs called benzodiazepines. These include Rohypnol, Valium (also called diazepam), temazepam and phenazepam (although this latter drug is sometimes found in street drugs, it is not prescribed by doctors in the UK).

The key effects of tranquillisers include:

- Sedation – depressing the nervous system and ‘slowing’ the brain and body down.
- Relief of tension and anxiety – helping the user feel calm and relaxed.
- Help with insomnia.
- Dependence – with some people getting very reliant on their use and finding if they stop that they get nasty withdrawal symptoms, including decreased concentration, tremors, nausea, vomiting, headaches, anxiety, panics and depression.

What are the effects of tranquillisers?

Tranquillisers are prescribed to treat anxiety and insomnia. Because of concerns about their addictiveness, they are mainly recommended only to be used in such cases for short-term use and when the problems are severe. They are also sometimes used to control epileptic fits and to treat alcohol withdrawals.

They have a number of effects:

- They depress the nervous system, which slows the brain and body down.
- They make the user feel calm and relaxed and can help people get to sleep.
- They suppress fits.
- Some cause short-term memory loss.
- Big doses can make a user forgetful and make them overly sleepy.