

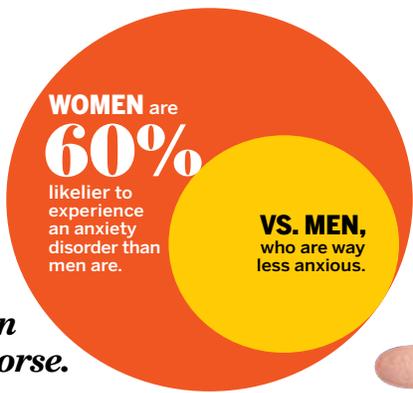
What's up with chill pills?

Doesn't it seem as if everyone you know is taking Xanax? Prescriptions for anxiety meds are definitely on the rise. *That* may be something to worry about. **By Amanda Woerner**

CLEARLY, WE'RE A NERVOUS NATION

Anxiety affects 40 million adults in the U.S.

That's 18 percent of all women and men. But we gals get it worse.



Here's how the pills work



Benzodiazepines (including Xanax and Ativan) block nerve signals that trigger anxiety and raise levels of calming chemicals, says psychiatrist Catherine Birndorf, M.D., SELF's happiness expert.



Scripts are up

2011	47.8 MILLION	Total Rx's written for alprazolam*
2004	33.9 MILLION	

"In the short term, benzos can help treat occasional panic attacks—or be used for specific situations, like a fear of flying," Dr. Birndorf says.

*The generic form of Xanax

"Benzos are a Band-Aid, not a cure."

Dr. Birndorf

"I suspect **some doctors end up overprescribing benzos** because it's easier to give patients a quick fix than to take the time to address what's causing the anxiety in the first place. The first line of treatment for anxiety should be psychotherapy or antidepressants," Dr. Birndorf says. And although you might think that chronic worriers are good candidates for these meds, **benzos aren't the best choice for people who stress constantly**, she warns. "If that sounds like you, consider getting more comprehensive treatment."

Can they be risky? Yes



BENZOS CAN BE HABIT-FORMING, Dr. Birndorf says. If you do take them regularly, make sure you taper off with the help of a doc. **One in three** people who popped alprazolam daily for two months experienced withdrawal after stopping.

DON'T. DO. THIS. EVER. Overusing benzos with other drugs can be fatal. Benzo-related hospital admissions nearly tripled from 1998 to 2008; 95 percent involved the abuse of another substance. Whitney Houston and Heath Ledger both had benzos and other drugs in their system when they died. Scary!



WATCH THE DRINKING

Benzos mixed with booze can cause you to stop breathing. If you must sip, stick with one drink.

Why not try this?



12 TO 16 SESSIONS of **cognitive behavioral therapy** can give you the tools to manage your anxiety better. Find a therapist at ABCT.org.



20 MINUTES of **exercise a day** has been proven to reduce stress and general anxiety, and improve your mood all day.



10 MINUTES of **daily meditation** soothes stress, too. Plus, there are no side effects—other than feeling calmer, that is.