

Clinical Question: Can zopiclone cause dizziness, fever, or nausea upon discontinuation?

Zopiclone is recommended for short-term insomnia and should not be used for more than 7-10 days consecutively.¹ The use of sedatives like zopiclone may lead to the development of physical and psychological dependence on the medication. The risk of dependence is greater with increased dose (normal adult dose = 7.5 mg / day) and duration of treatment.² Once physical dependence has developed, abruptly discontinuing zopiclone can lead to withdrawal symptoms, especially for patients on higher doses and longer duration of use^{1,2}

Withdrawal symptoms can include convulsions, tremor, abdominal and muscle cramps, nausea, vomiting, sweating, abnormal unhappiness or discontent, perceptual disturbances, irritability, restlessness and insomnia.^{2,3} The more severe withdrawal symptoms are usually associated with higher doses and longer use.² There are case reports of patients experiencing sweating, flushing, palpitations, anxiety, tremors and rebound insomnia upon discontinuation.⁴

Recommendations for Discontinuing Zopiclone Use:

Abrupt discontinuation of zopiclone should be avoided in order to avoid withdrawal symptoms. Instead, a gradual dose decrease is recommended for any patient taking the drug for more than a few weeks.²

As always, the focus should be to treat the underlying medical or psychological problem causing the insomnia. The patient should be reminded about proper sleep hygiene and stimulant (i.e caffeine, alcohol & nicotine) avoidance, exercise and relaxation techniques. These are recommended as treatments of choice.⁵ The patient may want to consider stopping the medication during a low stress time such as on the weekend, or decrease total sleep time by about 20 minutes, 2 nights before stopping the medication.⁶

Bottom Line

The patient is likely experiencing withdrawal symptoms caused by the abrupt discontinuation of zopiclone, a drug on which he had formed physical dependence. He had been taking zopiclone for over two years and more recently at a dose of 15 mg hs. Withdrawal symptoms can include nausea and possibly dizziness due to perceptual disturbances. Symptoms such as sweating and flushing may be mistaken for a fever but I am unable to find any literature specific to a fever.

¹ Lexi- Comp, Inc (2009). Lexi-Comp Online. Zopiclone. Accessed 18-Feb-2009 through University of Saskatchewan Library Portal.

² Compendium of Pharmaceuticals and Specialties (CPS). e-CPS. Zopiclone. Accessed 17-Feb-2008 through University of Saskatchewan Library Portal.

³ MayoClinic.com. Zopiclone (oral route). Accessed from: <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/drug-information/DR601455> on 18-Feb-2009.

⁴ Jones I R and Sullivan G, Physical dependence on zopiclone: case reports. *BMJ* 1998;316:117. Accessed 17-Feb-2009 from bmj.com through University of Saskatchewan Library Portal.

⁵ Hajak G, Müller W E, Wittchen H U, Pittrow D & Kirch W. Abuse and dependence potential for the non-benzodiazepine hypnotics zolpidem and zopiclone: a review of case reports and epidemiological data. Accessed 17-Feb-2009 through University of Saskatchewan Library Portal.

⁶ Regier L & Jensen B. RxFiles (Feb 07) – Sedatives: A Concise Overview. P. 84.