

Counselor's Corner, October 2014



What's in Your Medicine Cabinet?

As we age, we often find the number of medications we take are increasing. So it was of particular concern when, last month, the journal BMJ reported research that confirmed a higher risk for Alzheimer's and other dementias for those who take commonly prescribed benzodiazepines, such as Xanax, Ativan, Valium, and Ambien. The study showed that the incidence of Alzheimer's and other dementias was as much as 51% higher in older adults who took these drugs for extended periods. Past studies have indicated that the effects, including diminished memory and thinking skills, are temporary, but this new study was rigorous enough to raise concerns that these effects are irreversible in long-term users of benzodiazepines.

There are additional reasons to be concerned about routine use of benzodiazepines in older adults. Studies have linked the drugs with car crashes, falls and hip fractures. Yet despite these warning, these medications are used by nearly half of older adults, the study says.

Many older adults begin using these medications when they become anxious, depressed, or experience insomnia. If you are experiencing these symptoms, **call CJFS, we can help**—our clinical social workers are experts in working with older adults and can help you learn to cope and manage your symptoms, often without medication.

Remember, before changing your medication regimen, always consult your doctor.