

# MEDIA RELEASE

NEWS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

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ATTENTION: Chiefs of Staff, News Directors

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## New research survey to examine impact of anti-anxiety medications on driving

A new UTAS School of Psychology research project is examining the effects of common anti-anxiety medications on the user's driving ability.

Benzodiazepines (such as Valium® and Xanax®) are a class of drugs currently used for anxiety and sleep problems. It is normally recommended that benzodiazepines are used for the shortest time period possible, as it is thought that the anti-anxiety effects reduce after four weeks.

However, there is widespread evidence that usage goes beyond this time-frame, with people continuing to take the medication for periods of up to ten years.

UTAS Doctoral Psychology candidate Aneliese Poorter is investigating whether this continued usage of benzodiazepines has any impact on the user's driving skills.

The study is interested in both driving and other accidents, as well as the participant's own thoughts on how their driving is affected.

Another area that the study is investigating is small slips of memory that can have more serious consequences, like forgetting to turn off a heater.

Ms Poorter is conducting a completely anonymous online survey to gauge users' experiences.

"We know that people are affected when they first start taking these medications, for example, their coordination is reduced and they feel drowsy

"But we're not so sure how people are affected as time goes on."

Ms Poorter said while most of us jump in our cars everyday on "auto-pilot", driving is actually a very complex skill.

"We're interested in looking at driving particularly because it actually needs a lot of concentration.

“It requires a lot of different skills to be integrated, so if you are going to see a medication-related deficit, it is likely to be most evident in driving.

“We are also interested in finding out about people who take the drug for different lengths of time and what their experiences are.

“One of the things we know about benzodiazepines is they can have quite serious side effects and that they tend to become less effective as time goes on,” she said.

“However, people do experience withdrawal symptoms and ‘rebound anxiety’ when they stop taking them, which can make ceasing these medications difficult.”

Ms Poorter said it was difficult to predict what the outcomes of the research might be and she is therefore hoping to get around 500 participants in the online survey.

**Those interested in taking part in the study can visit:**

[www.tinyurl.com/utasbenzo](http://www.tinyurl.com/utasbenzo)

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