

TABLE 4. SOME POSSIBLE CAUSES OF PROTRACTED BENZODIAZEPINE WITHDRAWAL SYMPTOMS

Possible mechanisms	Effects
1. Learning of stress-coping strategies blocked by benzodiazepine use exposed on withdrawal	Anxiety, vulnerability to stress
2. Impairment of memory caused by benzodiazepines prevents normal resolution of distressing life events which are exposed on withdrawal	Anxiety, depression
3. Traumatic experiences during previous withdrawal	Post-traumatic stress symptoms
4. (?) Biochemical alterations caused by benzodiazepines (serotonin, norepinephrine [noradrenaline], stress hormones)	Depression
5. Nervous system hyperexcitability due to persisting changes in GABA/ benzodiazepine receptors	Sensory and motor symptoms, anxiety, insomnia
6. (?) Structural or functional damage to brain tissue	Poor memory and cognition
7. (?) Changes in gut and immune systems	Gastrointestinal symptoms
8. (?) Long-term retention of benzodiazepines in tissues of the body	Prolongs nervous system hyperexcitability

(?) indicates possible mechanisms for which at present there is no scientific evidence