EP EMBRACE PSYCHIATRY
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Side Effect Tracker: Anti-Anxiety Medications

A weekly worksheet — complete it and bring it to every visit

What this is: Anti-anxiety medications work in different ways depending on the class. **Daily medications** (such as SSRIs and SNRIs — for example Zoloft, Lexapro, Prozac, and Effexor) are taken every day to lower baseline anxiety over time; for these, use the separate Side Effect Tracker: Antidepressants worksheet alongside this one. **As-needed medications** (buspirone, hydroxyzine, gabapentinoids, and benzodiazepines — for example Buspar, lorazepam, and clonazepam) are used for situational anxiety or short-term relief and have their own side effects and safety rules, which this tracker covers.

How to use this tracker: Each evening, rate each item for that day: **0** = not at all, **1** = a little, **2** = quite a bit, **3** = very much. Also record each day whether you took an as-needed medication and how many doses. Bring the completed sheet to every visit.

Name: _____ **Week of:** _____ **Medication(s) & dose(s):** _____

Part 1 — Daily Side Effect Ratings (0–3)

Rate the items that apply to the medication(s) you are taking.

Side effect to watch for	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
Drowsiness or grogginess							
Dizziness or lightheadedness							
Dry mouth							
Nausea or stomach upset							
Headache							
Jittery or "activated" feeling (daily meds, early weeks)							
Swelling of hands, feet, or legs							
Memory fog or feeling "slowed down"							

Part 2 — Daily Context

Each day, record:	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
As-needed medication taken? (Y / N)							
Number of as-needed doses							
What triggered the anxiety (situation, thoughts, nothing obvious)							

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Anxiety level (1 = calm, 5 = severe)							
Alcohol today? (Y / N)							
Notes (sleep, caffeine, other meds, anything unusual)							

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Part 3 — What to Know About Each Class

Buspirone

Taken daily and takes 2–4 weeks to reach full effect — it is not an instant calm-down pill. Side effects are usually mild: dizziness, headache, and nausea. It does not cause dependence or sedation the way benzodiazepines can.

Antihistamine-type (as-needed)

Hydroxyzine is an example in this class: an antihistamine-type medication used as needed for anxiety and tension. The main side effects are drowsiness and dry mouth. Do not drive or do safety-sensitive work until you know how it affects you.

Gabapentinoids

Taken daily for anxiety in some treatment plans. Watch for drowsiness, dizziness, and swelling of the hands or feet. Do not stop abruptly — your prescriber will taper the dose down if it is discontinued.

⚠ Benzodiazepines — important safety rules

This class (examples include lorazepam and clonazepam) works quickly for acute anxiety and panic, but it carries real risks:

- **Dependence:** The body can become dependent within weeks of regular use. Stopping suddenly after regular use can cause withdrawal (rebound anxiety, shaking, seizures). These medications are meant for **short-term or occasional use**, as prescribed.
- **Sedation:** Do not drive, operate machinery, or do safety-sensitive work while they are in effect.
- **NEVER combine with alcohol or opioids.** This combination can slow or stop breathing and can be fatal.
- Take only the dose prescribed, only when you need it — not on a fixed daily schedule unless your prescriber specifically directs it.
- Keep these locked away like any controlled substance, and never share them.

Daily medications (SSRIs and SNRIs)

These are the first-line, long-term medications for most anxiety disorders. Because their side effects overlap with antidepressants, track them on the Side Effect Tracker: Antidepressants worksheet. Key reminders: give them 4–6 weeks, do not stop abruptly, and call right away for worsening mood or thoughts of self-harm.

When to call the office

- Side effects are moderate (2s or 3s) for several days in a row, or are getting worse
- Drowsiness is interfering with work, driving, or daily life
- You are needing your as-needed medication more and more often
- You feel you are becoming dependent on a benzodiazepine, or want to take more than prescribed
- You drank alcohol with your medication, or want to talk about alcohol use honestly
- You feel worse instead of better, or have thoughts of harming yourself — call immediately, or call or text **988**

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My notes for the next visit:

Patient signature: **Date:** **Reviewed by:**

A note on honesty: There are no "good" or "bad" scores here. This tracker works best when you record as-needed use truthfully — how often you reach for it tells your care team whether your daily treatment plan needs adjusting. The most useful tracker is an honest one.

Please read: This handout is for education only and is not medical advice. Do not start, stop, or change any medication without talking to your prescriber. If you are in crisis, call or text **988** (Suicide and Crisis Lifeline) or text **HOME** to **741741**.

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