

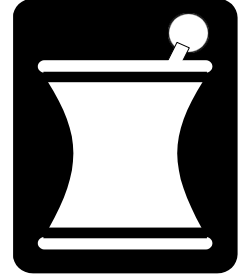
Melatonin

Patient Information - Hillmorton Hospital Pharmacy

Why have I been prescribed melatonin?

Melatonin is used to treat insomnia. Insomnia is the medical term for both difficulty falling asleep and staying asleep. Melatonin is also useful for sleep problems in children with behavioural, developmental and intellectual conditions. There is a small amount of evidence for using melatonin in jetlag.

Insomnia is not an illness itself but can cause distress. It can make some conditions worse, for example, mania in bipolar affective disorder.



Sleep Hygiene

There are several things you can do to help improve your sleep. These are called sleep hygiene. These principles of sleep hygiene are:

1. Avoid excessive use of caffeine, alcohol or nicotine. A hot milky (decaffeinated) drink at bedtime may help.
2. Do not stay in bed for a long time if you are not asleep.
3. Avoid daytime naps or long periods of doing nothing.
4. A warm bath or exercise a few hours before bedtime may help sleep.
5. Avoid hard exercise or tasks you must really focus on near bedtime.
6. Make sure that the bed and bedroom are comfortable and avoid excess noise and temperature (ear plugs may help if there is a lot of noise).
7. Get up at the same time each morning regardless of how long you slept (this makes sure that you are ready for sleep the next night).

What exactly is melatonin?

Melatonin (N-Acetyl-Methoxytryptamine) is a hormone produced by the pineal gland in the brain. Melatonin is released by the brain soon after dark with most being released at 2am to 4am and then less as the night progresses. Melatonin is thought to help our bodies know when it's time to go to sleep and when it's time to wake up. It is not a sedative as such. Taking extra melatonin can help restore a disrupted sleep-wake cycle.

Melatonin is available as slow release 2mg tablets and as capsules. Melatonin is funded by PHARMAC only for a small range of conditions and so for most people there is a modest cost involved, of about \$30 a month.

Is melatonin safe to take?

Yes, it is. Melatonin is not addictive. There are no withdrawal or discontinuation symptoms with melatonin. People do not abuse it. Melatonin is produced naturally by the brain.

- Tell your doctor if you have seizures, epilepsy, kidney problems, liver problems or an autoimmune disease as they will need to think carefully about whether melatonin is right for you.
- Melatonin may have some effects on sex hormones and so it not recommended in pregnancy and breast feeding.
- Tell your doctor if you have a rare hereditary problem called galactose intolerance, the LAPP lactase deficiency or glucose-galactose malabsorption.

How should I take my melatonin and what should I do if I miss a dose?

- Take the dose of melatonin one to two hours before bedtime, preferably with or after food (to make sure it isn't absorbed too quickly by the body). Most people find their sleep improves within the first few weeks of treatment.
- If you forget before going to bed, take a dose anytime up until you go to sleep. Do not take a dose at any time during the day (unless you do shift work or are specifically told to take it at another time) or it will confuse your brain.

What will happen to me when I start taking melatonin?

Melatonin works by helping you get to sleep sooner. You can usually tell quite quickly if it is going to be helpful for you. Melatonin is well tolerated. In general, studies suggest adverse effects are no more common with melatonin than they are with the non-medicated pills (placebo). As with most medicines it is possible you could have an allergic reaction to Melatonin.

Melatonin rarely causes drowsiness, however you should not drive or use machinery for eight hours after taking melatonin.

Are there any medicines that I should avoid or take care with?

Melatonin reacts with some other medicines, however only minor problems are expected:

- Cimetidine, oral contraceptives, HRT (hormone replacement therapy) and quinolone antibiotics (e.g. ciprofloxacin, norfloxacin) can increase sometimes the effects of melatonin
- Alcohol, carbamazepine, rifampicin and smoking can decrease the effect of melatonin
- Melatonin can increase the sedating effect of benzodiazepines (e.g. diazepam, lorazepam, temazepam) and zopiclone

When I feel better, can I stop taking melatonin?

You and your doctor should decide together when you can come off it. Melatonin is not addictive or known to cause dependence. As no withdrawal symptoms have been seen, you could stop it suddenly without any risk of problems. It is best to use melatonin for the full prescribed course though.

What about alcohol and marijuana?

Alcohol and marijuana can cause drowsiness, but they can also impair how well you sleep. You should avoid drinking alcohol or using marijuana when taking melatonin, as it may reduce how well melatonin works.

Is melatonin a licensed medicine?

One brand of melatonin is currently licensed in New Zealand by Medsafe (the government organisation responsible for regulating medicines).

Your doctor may choose to prescribe you a brand of melatonin that is not licensed. They will discuss this with you and what the benefits of this would be.

SIDE EFFECT	WHAT IS IT?	WHAT SHOULD I DO IF THIS HAPPENS TO ME?
Common		
Headache	Your head is pounding and painful.	Try aspirin or paracetamol. Your pharmacist will be able to advise if these are safe to take with any other medicines you may be taking.
Abnormal Dreams	More vivid dreams that you remember	This usually wears off in a few days
Dizziness	Feeling light headed and faint	Don't stand up too quickly. Don't drive or operate machinery.
Uncommon		
Depression	Transient low mood can occur	Talk to your doctor
Nausea and vomiting	Feeling sick and wanting to throw up	This is generally mild. Talk to your doctor if it persists.
Melatonin generally has very few side effects. Do not be worried by this list of side effects. You may get none at all. There are a few other rare side effects. If you develop any unusual symptoms, ask your doctor about them next time you meet.		

Remember, leaflets like this can only describe some effects of medication. You may also find other books or leaflets useful. If you have access to the internet, you may find a lot of information there as well but be careful as internet-based information is not always accurate.

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