



FAQs for members

Frequently Asked Questions about Insomnia – Trouble Sleeping

Almost everyone has trouble sleeping from time to time. The term insomnia can mean: trouble falling asleep, waking up during the night and having trouble falling back to sleep, or waking up too early in the morning. These are not necessarily problems unless they make you feel tired all the time. Insomnia can be caused by many factors including some medical conditions (sleep apnea, restless leg syndrome, depression, anxiety and stress), medicines (prescription, over-the-counter and herbal), and by caffeine, alcohol and tobacco.

I just can't fall asleep? What can I do?

There are several things one can do to help get a good night's sleep. The most effective step you can take is to improve your sleep "hygiene" or habits.

- Go to bed and wake up at around same times each day, even on weekends. Avoid naps.
- If you cannot fall asleep within 15 to 30 minutes after going to bed, get up and read or do some other relaxing activity until you feel tired.
- Reduce stress. Do something relaxing in the evening before bedtime.
- Avoid caffeine (especially after noon), alcohol, tobacco, and medicines that keep you awake.
- Try drinking less in the evening to avoid waking up to go to the bathroom during the night.
- Get regular exercise for 30-60 minutes at least 3 times a week, but do it at least 4-6 hours before bedtime.
- Reserve the bedroom only for sleep and sexual activity, not for watching TV or other activities.

I have seen sleep medicines advertised recently. Are these new medicines better to take for insomnia?

- These medicines have **not** been proven to be more effective than the standard medicines used for insomnia, and they are much more expensive. The newer prescription medicines you may have seen advertised include zolpidem (Ambien, Ambien CR), eszopiclone (Lunesta), zaleplon (Sonata) and ramelteon (Rozerem).
- The first step for treating insomnia is improving sleep habits. If you have good sleep habits but still have difficulty sleeping, then there are several medicines which can be helpful when used now and then:
 - Over-the-counter (OTC) antihistamine medicines such as diphenhydramine (Benadryl, Tylenol PM, Unisom)
 - Prescription medicines such as trazodone (Desyrel) and temazepam (Restoril).
- Common side effects of insomnia medicines are daytime drowsiness, memory problems, and difficulty driving or doing things that require you to be alert.
- Frequent use of sleep medicines can cause some people to become dependent on them.
- Patients with glaucoma, constipation, or an enlarged prostate (BPH) should avoid using OTC antihistamine sleep medicines.

Are there any special considerations for older people who commonly have trouble sleeping?

- Older people often need less sleep. The number of hours of sleep needed to feel refreshed depends on age, genetics, general health, and lifestyle.
- Every effort should be made to treat insomnia in elderly persons without the use of medicines.
- Early morning awakening can often be helped by avoiding naps and limiting fluid intake in the evening.

- Older people are at higher risk of having side effects from sleep medicines, particularly the risk of falls. OTC sleep medicines like Tylenol PM and Unisom should also be avoided because they contain the antihistamine, diphenhydramine, which is more apt to cause dizziness and other side effects in older persons.
- If an elderly person continues having trouble sleeping despite efforts to improve sleep hygiene, a sleep medicine such as trazodone or temazepam may be tried in a low dose for a short period of time (< 30 days).

Do herbal medicines help insomnia?

- Herbal medicines and supplements such as melatonin and valerian are sold over-the-counter. At the present time, not enough is known about whether these medicines are safe or work well for treating insomnia.
- If you are taking them, be sure to discuss melatonin or valerian use with your healthcare professional.

If you have further questions about insomnia medicines, please speak with your pharmacist or doctor. You can also find good information about getting a good night sleep in your Kaiser Permanente Heathwise Handbook and on the Kaiser Permanente website at *member.kp.org*.

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