



Insomnia Medications: Facts for Patients and Families



Chronic insomnia disorder may be diagnosed when you experience difficulties getting to sleep, staying asleep or waking up too early for at least three nights per week, lasting longer than three months.

If you are struggling with daytime functioning because of these sleep difficulties, you should contact your health care provider who will work with you to create a treatment plan.

Behavioral therapies are the recommended initial treatments for chronic insomnia disorder. However, your health care provider may also suggest prescription sleep medication as part of your treatment plan. These medications are generally only used for a short period of time.

If your provider thinks medication is appropriate for you, they may suggest medications that work to slow activity in your brain to help you sleep. The table lists some of the medications used to treat insomnia.

Suggested medications	Not enough evidence to recommend for or against use
Low dose doxepin	Ramelteon
Eszopiclone Zaleplon Zolpidem	Suvorexant

You may want to ask your health care provider the following questions about medications for chronic insomnia:

- Which medications are used for insomnia and how do they work?
- What are the possible side effects of taking these medications?
- How long will I take these medications?



CAUTION Some prescription drugs may have serious side effects. Before taking any medications for sleep, discuss the risks and benefits with your health care provider.



CAUTION Over-the-counter medications, such as diphenhydramine (Benadryl®), should be avoided to treat insomnia.



CAUTION Alcohol is not a recommended sleep aid.

While some people may think herbal supplements are natural therapy with no potential negative effects, there are a few things you should know about four common herbal sleep supplements:

Herbal Supplement*	What You Need to Know
Melatonin	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Herbal supplements haven't shown any significant sleep improvement.Herbal supplements may contain impurities and manufacturers are not required to ensure safety.The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has issued an advisory about the risk of liver damage or death associated with kava.
Chamomile	
Valerian	
Kava	

These substances may be available in various forms, such as pills, teas, or liquid. **Some health care providers may prescribe supplements under certain conditions based on individual patient and provider preference. Be sure to talk with your provider about any supplements you are taking.*



Department of Veterans Affairs and Department of Defense health care providers who use this information are responsible for considering all applicable regulations and policies throughout the course of care and patient education. Created August 2020 by the Psychological Health Center of Excellence.

Resources



Sleep Education

A resource provided by the American Academy of Sleep Medicine
sleepeducation.org



National Sleep Foundation

sleepfoundation.org



Society of Behavioral Sleep Medicine

behavioralsleep.org

Mobile Apps



CBT-i Coach

For people who are engaged in cognitive behavioral therapy for insomnia (CBT-I), this free app helps you develop positive sleep routines and sleep environments. Find it at mobile.va.gov/app/cbt-i-coach, or your preferred app store.

Reference

The Management of Chronic Insomnia Disorder and Obstructive Sleep Apnea Work Group, Department of Veterans Affairs & Department of Defense (2019). VA/DoD Clinical Practice Guideline for the Management of Chronic Insomnia Disorder and Obstructive Sleep Apnea. Version 1.0

