

# Melatonin patient information leaflet

This leaflet provides information regarding treatment with melatonin for sleep problems. It is designed to offer general advice. You should always ask your doctor or pharmacist if you have any questions about you or your child's treatment. The leaflet provided with the medicine also contains essential information, so please read that too.

## **What is melatonin and why has it been prescribed for me or my child?**

Melatonin is a hormone (a natural chemical messenger) the body makes to help with sleep. It is released when it gets dark outside. It can also be taken as a medicine prescribed by a doctor and can help people fall asleep faster and sleep for longer.

## **How is melatonin taken?**

Melatonin is taken in tablet form half an hour to an hour before sleep. For people who have trouble swallowing tablets your doctor can prescribe a brand of melatonin called Adaflex tablets. These are specially made for people who are unable to swallow tablets whole as they can be crushed and mixed with water before taking.

## **What else can I do to help myself (or my child) get a good night's sleep?**

As well as taking melatonin, your doctor will give you tips on how to get a good night's sleep. These tips are called "sleep hygiene". Sleep hygiene is important because it can help people sleep even better than taking melatonin alone. Before prescribing melatonin, your doctor would have made sure that sleep hygiene on its own was not enough to help you (or your child) with the sleep problem.

Some things people can do for good sleep hygiene are:

- Go to bed and get up at the same time every day.
- Avoid caffeine and alcohol 6 hours before going to bed (if this is relevant to you).
- Make sure the bedroom is dark, quiet, and cool.
- Have a relaxing bedtime routine, such as taking a warm bath an hour before bedtime or listening to relaxing music.
- Avoid using electronic devices in the bedroom.

Even if melatonin improves sleep, it is important to continue to follow good sleep hygiene if you want to get the best sleep possible for you or your child.

There is lots of useful information on the internet that explains sleep and sleep hygiene in more detail. Start by searching for the word "sleep" on the NHS website. If you want to visit the NHS website, type [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk) into your web browser.

### **Are there any safety concerns that I should be worried about?**

Melatonin has been used safely for many years around the world. Common side-effects include headaches, feeling sick or feeling tired. These side-effects should reduce over time. If you (or your child) experience any side-effects that are long lasting or worry you, contact your doctor or pharmacist for advice.

While melatonin has been shown to be safe for short-term use (up to 2 years), there is not enough data to determine its safety for longer. For this reason it is not normally prescribed for long-term use. It is recommended to take melatonin for the shortest time possible (such as a few months or up to a year). Many people who stop taking melatonin find they can still get a good night's sleep, particularly if they continue to follow good sleep hygiene.

For a small number of people doctors may recommend continuing melatonin treatment for longer than 2 years. If this is the case for you or your child, the doctor will discuss the risks and benefits with you.

### **How can I be sure that the melatonin is working?**

When people take melatonin every night for a long time, it can be hard to know if it is still working. That is why it is recommended to have a break from taking melatonin every so often. This is called a treatment holiday. If you (or your child) stop taking melatonin for a few weeks but start having trouble sleeping again, then the melatonin was probably working. If you (or your child) sleep well the melatonin treatment should stop. You (or your child) should continue to practice good sleep hygiene to get the best sleep.

Treatment holidays are usually recommended at least once a year. Your doctor will advise you (or your child) to stop taking melatonin for 7-14 days. This is best done at a convenient time, such as in the school holidays or during time away from work. It is important to continue to practice good sleep hygiene during the treatment holiday.

In some people the way their body handles melatonin makes it less effective over time. Treatment holidays sometimes help the body "wash out" melatonin so it becomes effective for them again once they restart it. If you (or your child) think melatonin has become less effective speak to your doctor or pharmacist.

### **The following websites contain useful information:**

Adult's advice and information on sleep (including sleep hygiene and sleep diary):

<https://thesleepcharity.org.uk/information-support/adults/>

Children's information on sleep (including sleep hygiene and sleep diary):

<https://thesleepcharity.org.uk/information-support/children/>