

## Tips for Over the Counter Sleep Aids

### Sleep aids: The options

Over-the-counter sleep aids are widely available. Common choices and the potential side effects include:

- **Diphenhydramine (Benadryl, Unisom SleepGels, others).** Diphenhydramine is a sedating antihistamine. Side effects might include daytime drowsiness, dry mouth, blurred vision, constipation and urinary retention.
- **Doxylamine succinate (Unisom SleepTabs).** Doxylamine is also a sedating antihistamine. Side effects are similar to those of diphenhydramine.
- **Melatonin.** The hormone melatonin helps control your natural sleep-wake cycle. Some research suggests that melatonin supplements might be helpful in treating jet lag or reducing the time it takes to fall asleep - although the effect is typically mild. Side effects can include headache and daytime sleepiness.
- **Valerian.** Supplements made from this plant are sometimes taken as sleep aids. Although a few studies indicate some therapeutic benefit, other studies haven't found the same benefits. Valerian generally doesn't appear to cause side effects.

Store brands containing the same active ingredients as brand-name sleep aids are commonly available, too. Store brands have the same risks and benefits as their brand-name counterparts, often at a more reasonable cost.

### Important precautions

When using over-the-counter sleep aids, follow these steps:

- **Start with your doctor.** You don't need your doctor's OK to take an over-the-counter sleep aid. But it's a good idea to ask your doctor if the sleep aid might interact with other medications or underlying conditions, and to determine the best dosage.
- **Keep precautions in mind.** Diphenhydramine and doxylamine aren't recommended for people who have closed-angle glaucoma, asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, sleep apnea, severe liver disease, digestive system obstruction, or urinary retention. In addition, sleep aids pose risks for women who are pregnant or breast-feeding, and might pose risks to people over age 75, including the risk of stroke.
- **Take it one day at a time.** Over-the-counter sleep aids are a temporary solution for insomnia. Generally, they're not intended to be used for longer than two weeks.
- **Avoid alcohol.** Never mix alcohol and sleep aids. Alcohol can increase the sedative effects of the medication.
- **Beware of side effects.** Don't drive or attempt other activities that require alertness while taking sleep aids.



(Content from:

<http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-living/adult-health/in-depth/sleep-aids/art-20047860?pg=2>)

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