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Melatonin (say: mellow-toe-ninn)

What is melatonin used for?

- Melatonin (also called Circadin®, Slenyto®, Adaflex®, Ceyesto® and others) is mainly used to help treat insomnia i.e. problems getting to sleep
- It is licensed in adults over 55, and for children and adolescents with autism (Autistic Spectrum), Smith-Magenis syndrome, learning disabilities, jet-lag and other conditions
- This can be useful especially where poor sleep is a possible cause of aggression and agitation
- Circadin®, Ceyesto®and Slenyto® are available as tablets
- Melatonin is also made as plain tablets, capsules and liquids (e.g. 1mg/ml and other strengths).

Beware of buying melatonin over the Internet, especially from USA where melatonin is considered a food supplement. Thus tablets, capsules and gummies are not regulated in the same way that medicines are, and may not contain what the label says they contain. They may have no melatonin, too much or even other chemicals.

What is the usual dose of melatonin?

- The usual dose of melatonin is 2mg at bedtime, although it can be higher or lower.

How should I take melatonin?

- Swallow the tablet with at least half a glass of water whilst sitting or standing so it does not get stuck in your throat
- Follow the instructions for the liquid.

When should I take melatonin?

- Take your melatonin within 2 hours of going to bed
- It can be taken before, with, or after food.

You should make sure you use 'sleep hygiene' as well (see our website for more information and help)
Do not watch television or use a computer for an hour before going to bed as the light from these can stop your body making its own melatonin.

What are the alternatives to melatonin?

- There are many other medicines (e.g. 'Z hypnotics'), talking therapies, sleep hygiene and other treatments for insomnia and some of the causes of insomnia
- Self-help sleep Apps can also help.

☞ See our "Handy chart" for insomnia to help you compare the medicines available
☞ This will help you talk to your prescriber, nurse, pharmacist or other healthcare professional.

How long will melatonin take to work?

- Taking melatonin helps your brain get itself to sleep rather than sending you to sleep as such
- This effect can take a few weeks to fully kick in so make sure you take it for about a month or so to get the full effect
- Each dose can start to have an effect in about an hour and lasts about 4-8 hours or so.

How long will I need to keep taking it for?

- Circadin® can be taken for up to 13 weeks
- Slenyto® can be used for longer e.g. two years
- This is usually enough to get your brain back into the right pattern of sleeping again but it can be taken for longer than this.

Is melatonin addictive and can I stop taking it suddenly?

- Melatonin is not addictive and no discontinuation or withdrawal symptoms have been seen
- You can stop it suddenly without risk of any problems. Other than not sleeping well.

See our handy fact sheet on 'Coming off medicines'

What should I do if I forget to take a dose of melatonin?

- Take the dose as soon as you remember, before going to sleep
- If you forget completely, start again the next day.

If you need to take this every day and you have problems remembering your doses (as many people do) ask to see our Handy Fact Sheet "Remembering to take your medicines".

Can I drink alcohol while I am taking melatonin?

- If you drink alcohol while taking melatonin it may make you feel more sleepy, especially the next morning
- This is important if you need to drive or operate machines and you must seek advice on this.

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Will melatonin affect my other medication?

The main interactions with melatonin include:

- The effect of melatonin can be increased by cimetidine, oral contraceptives, HRT, fluvoxamine and some antibiotics (quinolones)
- The effect of melatonin can be decreased by alcohol, carbamazepine, rifampicin and smoking
- Melatonin can increase the effects of benzodiazepines (e.g. diazepam, lorazepam, temazepam), zopiclone and zopiclone.

You **must** also the Patient Information Leaflet (PIL) for the full possible list. Some of these medicines can be used together but you must follow your prescriber's instructions carefully.

Will I need any blood or other tests if I am taking melatonin?

- You should not need a blood test while you are taking melatonin.

Can I drive or cycle while I am taking melatonin?

- You may feel a sleepy the next morning after taking melatonin so be careful as it may slow down your reaction times
- Until this wears off, or you know how melatonin affects you, do not drive or operate machines.

What sort of side-effects might I get if I am taking melatonin?

This table shows some of the most common side effects and any you might need to take action on. You **must** also see the maker's Patient Information Leaflet for the full list of possible side effects but do not be worried by this. Some people get no side effects at all. Some side effects are the brain getting used to a medicine and these usually wear off in a few days or weeks. Starting at a lower dose may help. If you think you might have a side effect to this medicine, you should ask your prescriber, pharmacist or other healthcare professional.

Side effect	What happens	What to do about it
VERY COMMON *(more than about 1 in 10 people might get these)*		
Headache	Your head is pounding and painful.	Try paracetamol. Your pharmacist will be able to advise if this is safe to take with any other medicines you may be taking.
Abnormal dreams	Your dreams seem more vivid than usual and there seem to be more of them.	This is nothing to worry about. It is probably just that you are remembering your dreams more.
Nausea	Feeling sick and possibly being sick.	Take the melatonin with or after food. If you are sick for more than a day, contact your doctor. This tends to wear off after a few days or a week or so.
Dizziness	Feeling light-headed and faint.	Don't stand up too quickly. Try and lie or sit down if you feel it coming on. Don't drive. While you are taking this medicine, do **not** share a sleeping surface e.g. bed, sofa, chair, with any baby, even by accident, in case you fall asleep (see Lullaby Trust website). If you are very tired, place the baby somewhere safe before resting.

The small print: This leaflet is to help you understand more about melatonin. You **must** also read the manufacturer's Patient Information Leaflet (PIL). The 'Handy charts' will help you compare the main medicines for each condition, how they work and their side effects. Go to our website for fuller answers to these and many other questions. Do not share medicines with anyone else. Use trusted health professionals for help when making health decisions. Do **not** rely on AI for your mental health advice – it may not be accurate for you, may miss important signs, does not know your history, and may give you a false sense of support.

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