Melatonin for the treatment of non-REM parasomnias

This leaflet gives you information about melatonin, which has been prescribed to treat your sleep disorder. If you have any questions or concerns, please speak to the doctor, pharmacist or nurse caring for you.

What are non-REM parasomnias?
Sleep is divided into two different stages: rapid eye movement (REM), where we do most of our dreaming, and non-REM (which can be divided again, into light and deep stages of sleep).

People who have non-REM parasomnias have partial awakenings from deep sleep during the night. This leads to people having abnormal, unwanted events or experiences, sometimes being able to perform complex tasks, which they may not remember as they are still partially asleep. This can include sleepwalking or experiencing sleep terrors. In extreme cases, non-REM parasomnias can cause physical injury or severe emotional upset.

What is melatonin?
Melatonin is a natural chemical which is released by the brain during the hours of darkness. It is involved in the promotion of sleep and the regulation of the human body clock. Because of this, melatonin is used as a medicine to treat sleep disorders that involve disruption of the body clock and those which cause abnormal events during sleep.

Taking an unlicensed medicine
The use of melatonin for the treatment of non-REM parasomnia is unlicensed, which means that the manufacturer of the medicine has not specified it can be used in this way. However, there is evidence that it works to treat this particular condition. The leaflet, Unlicensed medicines – a guide for patients, has more information about unlicensed medicines. If you would like a copy, please ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist. Alternatively you can call the Pharmacy Medicines Helpline (details are at the end of this leaflet).

How do I take the medicine?
For the treatment of non-REM parasomnia, the usual dose of melatonin can range from 0.5mg-6mg every night. The person prescribing this medicine for you will let you know what dose you should take. Melatonin is supplied as modified-release (long-acting) 2mg tablets (Circadin®), and these can be cut into halves or quarters, to make up the dose you need. It is okay to split the tablet when a lower dose or a more immediate effect is required, as your consultant will explain. You will be supplied with a tablet cutter if this is necessary, and you will be shown how to do this. Melatonin should be taken orally (by mouth) once a day at night, three hours before bedtime. It should be swallowed whole (unless taking doses lower than 2mg), with a glass of water after food.

Keep taking the medicine until your doctor tells you otherwise.
What should I do if I forget to take the medicine?

If you forget to take a dose of melatonin, don’t worry. Take the next dose when it is due. **Do not take an extra dose the following night to make up for the missed dose.**

Are there any side effects?

In addition to their desired effects, most medicines can cause unwanted side effects although not everyone gets them. The following are examples of some of the side effects reported by patients taking melatonin. The unwanted effects often fade as your body adjusts to the new medicine, but speak with your GP or pharmacist if any of the following continue or become troublesome.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Side effect</th>
<th>What should I do if it happens?</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uncommon (between one in 1000 and one in 100)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Headache</td>
<td>Take your usual painkiller, for example, paracetamol.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feeling tired or sleepy</td>
<td>Take the dose three hours before bedtime. Do not drive or use tools or machines until these effects have worn off.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indigestion, feeling sick (nausea), stomach ache</td>
<td>Stick to simple foods. Avoid rich or spicy meals.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reduced body temperature or night sweats</td>
<td>Contact your GP before taking the next dose.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dry or itchy skin</td>
<td>Try applying an anti-itch cream or a cooling moisturiser</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feeling irritable or restless</td>
<td>If any of these become troublesome, speak with your doctor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abnormal dreams</td>
<td>If any of these become troublesome, speak with your doctor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fast heart beat (palpitations)</td>
<td>Contact your GP before taking the next dose.</td>
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For further information on side effects, see the manufacturer’s leaflet that comes with the medicine.

Is there anything else I need to know?

**Do not drink alcohol while you are taking melatonin because it will reduce the medicine’s effectiveness in helping you to sleep.**

If you are a driver, please be aware that melatonin may affect your reactions and ability to drive. It is an offence to drive while your reactions are impaired. Even if your driving ability is not impaired, if you drive, you are advised to carry some evidence with you which shows that the medicine has been prescribed for you – a repeat prescription form or the patient information leaflet from the packet is generally considered suitable.

Melatonin should be kept out of reach of children. If anyone other than you takes this medicine, you, they, or their parent/carer should contact NHS 111 for advice. If they are unwell, they should call for an ambulance.

The expiry date is printed on the container. Do not use the medicine after this date. The remainder should be returned to your local pharmacy to be thrown away.

Store in a cool, dry place, away from direct heat and light.
Pregnancy and breastfeeding:
We do not recommend the use of this medicine if you are pregnant or breastfeeding. You should let your consultant know if you are planning a pregnancy so that a management plan can be agreed. If you discover that you are pregnant, please contact your consultant for advice as soon as possible.

Sleep hygiene: Taking melatonin is not a replacement for a good sleep routine. It is still important to aim to get around seven to eight hours of sleep at night if possible. It is advisable to go to bed when tired, and get up at about the same time each day.

Can I take melatonin with other medicines?
Melatonin may interact with some medicines. It is important to let us know about any medicines that you are currently taking, so that we can check it is suitable for you. If you are buying any medicines over the counter from a pharmacy always mention that you have been prescribed melatonin. Seek advice from a pharmacist when buying herbal or homeopathic remedies. It is safe to take paracetamol or ibuprofen with this medicine.

How will my treatment be reviewed?
Your treatment will be reviewed on an ongoing basis at the Sleep Disorders Centre and the dose adjusted depending on your symptoms. This will be a long-term treatment if it is of benefit. Your consultant will want to check to make sure that the treatment is helping.

How do I get a repeat prescription?
If you are responding to treatment and finding melatonin is helpful and appropriate for you, then your GP may take on prescribing once a stable dose is reached.

Your GP will give you a repeat prescription for melatonin which you can take to your local pharmacy for supply. Should your GP not prescribe melatonin for you, please contact the Sleep Disorders Centre for advice. Please make sure you request your repeat prescription early enough to prevent you running out, or missing, any doses of your medication.

Contact us
If you have any questions or concerns about your sleep disorder, please contact the Sleep Disorders Centre, t: 020 7188 3430, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm.

Out of hours, please leave a message and a member of staff will call you back in working hours, or contact your GP or NHS 111.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets

Pharmacy Medicines Helpline
If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline. t: 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

Your comments and concerns
For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.
t: 020 7188 8801 (PALS)  e: pals@gstt.nhs.uk
t: 020 7188 3514 (complaints)  e: complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk