

# Melatonin for the treatment of insomnia

This leaflet will give you some 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 is insomnia?

Insomnia is the most common sleep disorder in the UK. It can occur at any age and affect anyone. Insomnia can have a significant negative impact on mental health, daytime functioning and quality of life.

Insomnia is an experience of inadequate, or poor quality, sleep and normally shows one or more of the following sleep complaints:

- difficulty getting to sleep
- difficulty staying asleep
- waking up too early in the morning
- associated daytime symptoms, for example, feeling tired, lacking in energy, poor concentration, feeling irritable etc.

There are many causes which can contribute to the development of insomnia such as increased stress, physical health problems, or a significant life event. The original events which have caused the insomnia may resolve but the insomnia itself can continue. Management of insomnia includes a non-medicated approach (for example, cognitive behavioural therapy), prescribed medication (such as melatonin) or a combination of both.

## 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 has been used as a medicine to treat sleep disorders that involve disruption of the body clock.

## Taking an unlicensed medicine

In the UK, prescribed melatonin is licensed for adults aged over 55, and for a time limit of 13 weeks. However, there is evidence to suggest that it can be helpful and is safe to use in children and younger adults, and can be used for a longer period of time. When it is prescribed outside of the manufacture's specifications it becomes an unlicensed medicine. 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 – contact details are at the end of this leaflet

## How do I take the medicine?

Melatonin is supplied as modified-release 2mg tablets (Circadin®). For the treatment of insomnia, the usual dose of melatonin is 2mg at night. It is usually taken approximately 30-60 minutes before bedtime. It is okay to split the tablet when a lower dose or a more immediate effect is required, as per your doctor's instructions. You will be supplied with a tablet cutter if this is necessary, and we will explain how to do this. It should be swallowed with a glass of water, not on an empty stomach.

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 when next due 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 experiences 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.

Side effect	What should I do if it happens?
Uncommon (between one in 1,000 and one in 100)	
Headache	Take your usual painkiller (for example, paracetamol)
Feeling tired or sleepy	Take the dose three hours before bedtime. Do not drive and do not use tools or machines until these effects have worn off.
Indigestion, feeling sick (nausea), stomach ache	Stick to simple foods. Avoid rich or spicy meals.
Fast heart beat (palpitations)	Contact your GP before taking the next dose.
Dry or itchy skin	Try applying an anti-itch cream or a cooling moisturiser.
Feeling irritable or restless Abnormal dreams	If any of these become troublesome, speak with your doctor.

For further information on side effects, please 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. 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 with you some evidence that the medicine has been prescribed for you – a repeat prescription form, or a patient information leaflet from the pack, is generally considered suitable.

Melatonin should be kept out of reach of children. If anyone other than you takes this medicine, then 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 breast feeding**

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, contact them 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 if 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. Advice should also be sought from a pharmacist when purchasing 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 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 can 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. If your GP does not prescribe melatonin for you, please contact the sleep centre on the number listed below 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 Disorder 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; alternatively please contact your GP or NHS 111.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit **w:** [www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets](http://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, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm

## 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](mailto:pals@gstt.nhs.uk)  
**t:** 020 7188 3514 (complaints)      **e:** [complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk)

## Language and accessible support services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch. **t:** 020 7188 8815      **e:** [languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk)

## NHS 111

Offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day. **t:** 111

## NHS website

Online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you take control of your health and wellbeing. **w:** [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

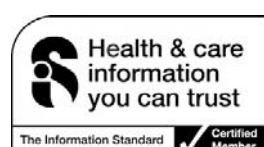
## Get involved and have your say: become a member of the Trust

Members of Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust contribute to the organisation on a voluntary basis. We count on them for feedback, local knowledge and support. Membership is free and it is up to you how much you get involved. To find out more, please get in touch.

**t:** 0800 731 0319      **e:** [members@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:members@gstt.nhs.uk)      **w:** [www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/membership](http://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/membership)

## Was this leaflet useful?

We want to make sure the information you receive is helpful to you. If you have any comments about this leaflet, we would be happy to hear from you, fill in our simple online form, **w:** [www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets](http://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets), or **e:** [patientinformationteam@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:patientinformationteam@gstt.nhs.uk)



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A list of sources is available on request