

Melatonin for Sleep

When the sun goes down, melatonin levels go up and help promote sleep.

What is melatonin?

Melatonin is a natural hormone made by your body that helps to stimulate sleep. Your body produces melatonin in response to darkness or lack of light. Melatonin levels go up in the evening when it gets dark. That signals your body that it is time to go to sleep. Conversely, in the morning, the light causes your melatonin levels to fall and you wake up.

Use of supplemental melatonin in children

A synthetic (man-made) form of melatonin can be given to children to help with sleep. This medicine is used only under the care of a sleep medicine provider or primary care doctor. It is most often given in pill form.

Children with delayed sleep phase syndrome or circadian rhythm disturbances are good candidates for this supplement. It can help them to fall asleep at bedtime and regulate the sleep/wake schedule. Melatonin has also been shown to increase total sleep time in children with autism and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.

Have your child practice good sleep hygiene along with melatonin use. Melatonin should help your child regulate sleep, but it will not work unless your child is also doing other steps in their sleep plan. These suggestions are outlined in our Sleep Hygiene for Children or Teenage Sleep tip sheets.

How is melatonin given?

Melatonin is given by mouth. It works best if taken about 30 to 60 minutes before you want your child to be asleep.

Melatonin doses range from 1 to 5 mg per night. Your sleep medicine provider will work with you to decide the correct dose for your child.

Where do I get melatonin?

It is found over-the-counter at most drug stores and comes in liquid, sublingual (a typed dissolved under the tongue), chewable or tablet forms. Timed-release tablets cannot be crushed or broken and so are not usable by young children who can't swallow tablets.

Since melatonin is found over-the-counter, it is not regulated by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). It will say on the bottle that it is not recommended for use in children. This is because it has not been thoroughly tested in kids. Like vitamins and other supplements, pay close attention to where the product is produced. Look for a USP code verifying that what is on the label has actually been checked in the product.

Melatonin reminds the body it is time to sleep but you also need to pay attention to your sleep environment. Have a sleep routine and a dark, quiet, cool room to support sleep.

Are there any side effects?

No known toxicity or serious side effects have been reported. Use of melatonin has not been studied extensively in children. Giving too much melatonin can cause morning drowsiness.

How long should I use melatonin?

Melatonin should be used under the direction of your sleep medicine provider or primary care doctor.

Common forms of melatonin:

Here is a list of common forms of melatonin sold over-the-counter without a prescription and where to get them:

- Rite Aid: Pharmassure brand, USP certified, comes in 3 mg tablets
- Trader Joe's brand 0.5 mg (500 microgram) chewable peppermint-flavored tablet
- Super Supplements: many different forms of melatonin
- Costco: Schiff brand, comes in 3 mg or 5 mg. Theanine and GABA are added to support relaxation and calming properties. Many brands are also adding Vitamin B for this reason as well.
- Fred Meyer: Kroger brand orange chewable tablet 3 mg or 5 mg dose
- Online: NOW brand comes in capsules that can be opened and sprinkled in food.
- Other supermarkets and pharmacies