



Using *Melatonin* in Children and Adolescents

This information explains how *melatonin* can be used as part of a treatment plan for children and adolescents with certain sleep disorders. You may wish to share this information with your family members to help them to understand your treatment options. Since every person's needs are different, it is important that you follow the advice provided to you by your own doctor, nurse and/or pharmacist and speak to them if you have any questions about this medication.



Overview

Melatonin is often called a neurohormone. It is normally secreted by a brain structure called the pineal gland. Melatonin is secreted mainly during the night and it enters the blood, body fluids and all tissues. In Canada, melatonin is available "over the counter" and does not need a prescription.

What is *melatonin* used for?

Melatonin promotes sleep. It is used to help with certain sleep disorders related to circadian rhythm ("body clock") disturbances, such as difficulties falling asleep or maintaining sleep.



How does *melatonin* work?

Melatonin regulates our internal body clock and sleep cycles. Taking melatonin is only effective for sleep if a person has low or absent natural melatonin levels. Melatonin can reduce the time needed to fall asleep.

How should *melatonin* be taken?

The recommended dose of melatonin should be taken by mouth 20-30 minutes before the desired bedtime. It may interfere with sleep if small doses are given several hours before bedtime in addition to the bedtime dose. The dosage is different for each person, and depends on the type of sleep disorder being treated and the person's response to melatonin.

The quick-acting capsules can be swallowed whole or may be opened and the contents dissolved in any preferred liquid just before use. Controlled-release tablets should be swallowed whole, and should NOT be crushed or chewed. A liquid form of melatonin is available for children who cannot swallow capsules or tablets.

When will *melatonin* start working?

Onset of sleepiness should occur within half an hour of taking melatonin.



How long do I have to take *melatonin*?

Melatonin can be taken on a regular basis or only as needed for as long as sleep problems persist. It remains effective for promoting sleep even when taken on a regular basis for extended periods of time. Due to the complex nature of sleep disorders, children should remain under a doctor's care during melatonin treatment.

Is *melatonin* addictive?

There is no evidence to show that melatonin is addictive.

What are the side effects of *melatonin* and what should I do if I get them?

Common side effects

If any of these possible side effects become troublesome, discuss them with your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist.

- vivid dreams
- morning drowsiness/tiredness following melatonin use (this will usually go away if the dose is decreased)

What precautions should my doctor and I be aware of when taking *melatonin*?

- Melatonin is thought to be very safe. Studies of melatonin in children with sleep problems found that melatonin was well tolerated and only rarely were any side effects reported, even over a long period of time.
- Melatonin does not appear to cause or worsen epilepsy, cause changes in onset of puberty, or interfere with the body's production of natural melatonin.
- Proper diagnosis of the sleep disorder is required prior to starting treatment. Melatonin is only effective in situations where a person has lowered levels of natural melatonin. Special laboratory tests are not necessary for patients taking melatonin.
- Melatonin is a natural product which is not regulated by Health Canada to the same extent as prescription medications. Melatonin is manufactured synthetically, and cannot transmit animal diseases. BC Children's Hospital uses the Twinlab brand of melatonin which has met pharmaceutical industry manufacturing standards.



What special instructions should I follow while using *melatonin*?

Keep all appointments with your doctor, and inform him or her about your sleep pattern and if you notice any other effects you think may be related to taking melatonin. This medication is not right for everyone, so DO NOT allow anyone else to use your melatonin.

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

Unlike with most of the other medications for sleep, sleep difficulties will not worsen ("rebound" effect) if a dose of melatonin is missed. If you take melatonin regularly and you forget to take it, skip the dose and take your next dose at its regularly scheduled time the next day. DO NOT double the dose to attempt to catch up.



What storage conditions are needed for *melatonin*?

- Keep this medication in the original container, stored at room temperature away from moisture and heat (e.g., not in the bathroom).
- Keep this medication out of reach from children.