



# Patient and Caregiver Information on Hypnotics/Sedatives

The name of your medication is \_\_\_\_\_.

## What is this drug used for?

This medication is used to **treat sleep problems**, such as problems falling asleep or remaining asleep for a reasonable number of hours or waking up often during the night. Sleeping problems occur in most individuals from time to time. If, however, sleeping problems persist, this may be a symptom of some other disorder, either medical or psychiatric.

A person may have difficulty in falling asleep because of stress or anxiety felt during the day, pain, physical discomfort or changes in daily routine (e.g., jet-lag, changes in work shifts, etc.). Any disease that causes pain (e.g., ulcers) or breathing difficulties (e.g., asthma or a cold) can interfere with continuous sleep. Stimulant drugs, including some ADHD treatments and caffeine, may also contribute to problems falling asleep; other medications may change sleep patterns when they are stopped (e.g., antidepressants, antipsychotics). Sleep will improve when these causes have been identified, corrected or treated.

Problems remaining asleep may be due to age, as older people tend to sleep less at night. Certain disorders, including depression, may also affect sleep.

Hypnotics/sedatives are similar to antianxiety (anxiolytic) drugs but tend to cause more drowsiness and incoordination; therefore, antianxiety drugs are sometimes given to treat sleep problems.

**Note:** These medications may not have formal approval by regulatory agencies such as Health Canada or the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for use in children or adolescents for some or all of the above uses.

## How quickly will the drug start working?

Hypnotics/sedatives can induce calmness or sedation usually within an hour. As some drugs act quickly, take the medication just prior to going to bed and relax in bed until the drug takes effect.

## How long should you take this medication?

Sleep problems are usually self-limiting; often when the cause of sleep difficulties is treated or eliminated, sleep will improve. Therefore, hypnotic/sedatives are usually prescribed for a limited period of time. Many individuals take the medication only when needed (during periods of insomnia) rather than on a daily basis. It is suggested that once you have slept well for 2 or 3 nights in a row, try to get to sleep without taking the sedative/hypnotic. Tolerance or loss of effectiveness can occur in some individuals if the medication is used every day for weeks or months. Individuals taking hypnotics for long periods of time have a risk of developing dependence – they may have difficulty stopping the medication and may experience withdrawal symptoms if the medication is stopped suddenly. To stop taking these medications following long-term use, the dosage should be gradually reduced over time, on the advice of your doctor.

If you have been taking the medication every day for a period of time, your doctor may try to reduce the dose of this drug slowly to

see if sleeping problems persist; if not, the dosage may be further reduced and you may be advised to stop using this medication.

**Do not increase the dose or stop the drug without consulting with your doctor.**

Some patients need to use a sedative/hypnotic drug for longer time periods because of the type of problems they may be experiencing. Others require it only from time to time, i.e., as needed.

## What side effects may happen?

**Side effects may happen with any drug. They are not usually serious and do not happen to everyone. Side effects may sometimes occur before beneficial effects of the medication are noticed. If you think you may be having a side effect, speak to your doctor or pharmacist as they can help you decrease it or cope with it.**

**Common** side effects that you should report to your doctor at the **NEXT VISIT** include:

- Morning hangover, feeling sleepy and tired – this problem may lessen with time; inform your doctor. Use of other drugs that make you drowsy will worsen the problem. Avoid driving a car or operating machinery if drowsiness persists.
- Muscle incoordination, weakness, lightheadedness or dizziness – inform your doctor; a change in your dosage may be needed.
- Forgetfulness, memory lapses – inform your doctor.
- Slurred speech – a change in your dosage may be needed.
- Nausea or heartburn – if this happens, take the medication with food.
- Bitter taste – can occur with certain drugs (e.g., zopiclone (Imovane) and eszopiclone (Lunesta)). Avoid drinking milk in the morning to lessen this effect.

**Less common** side effects that you should report to your doctor **RIGHT AWAY** include:

- Disorientation, confusion, worsening of your memory, periods of blackouts or amnesia
- Nervousness, excitement, agitation, hallucinations or any behavior changes
- Worsening of depression, suicidal thoughts
- Incoordination leading to falls
- Skin rash
- Rare incidents of sleepwalking, driving, aggression, and food binging while "asleep" have been reported.

Let your doctor know **right away** if you miss your period or think you may be **pregnant**, plan to become pregnant, or are breastfeeding.

## Is this drug safe to take with other medication?

**Because these drugs can change the effect of other medication or may be affected by other medication, always check with your doctor or pharmacist before taking other drugs, including those you can buy without a prescription such as cold remedies and herbal preparations. Always inform any doctor or dentist that you see that you are taking these drugs.**

### **Precautions/considerations**

1. Do not increase your dose without consulting your doctor.
2. Check with your doctor or pharmacist before taking other drugs, including drugs you can buy without prescription such as cold remedies and herbal preparations.
3. Speak to your doctor if you begin having sleeping problems after starting any new medication (e.g., for a medical condition).
4. This drug may impair the mental and physical abilities required for driving a car or operating machinery. Avoid these activities if you feel drowsy or slowed down.
5. This drug may increase the effects of alcohol, making you more sleepy, dizzy, and lightheaded. If taken together with alcohol, this may make it dangerous for you to drive, operate machinery, or perform tasks that require careful attention.
6. Do not stop taking this drug suddenly, especially if you have been on the medication for a number of months or have been taking high doses. Hypnotics/sedatives need to be withdrawn gradually to prevent withdrawal reactions.

### **What else do I need to know about hypnotics/sedatives?**

1. Take your medication about half an hour before bedtime; do not smoke in bed afterwards.
2. If you are prescribed zolpidem (Ambien CR) or ramelteon (Rozerem), do not split, crush or chew the tablet but swallow it whole.
3. If you are taking ramelteon or zaleplon (Sonata), do not consume a high-fat meal within 1 hour of taking this medication.
4. If you are taking sublingual forms of zolpidem (Edluar, Intermezzo, Sublinox) the tablet should be placed under the tongue, where it will disintegrate. The tablet should not be chewed or swallowed and should not be taken with water. The tablet should not be taken with or immediately after a meal.
5. Drinking a lot of caffeine (coffee, tea, caffeine-containing soft drinks, etc.) can cause you to become easily upset or jittery and make it harder for this drug to work.
6. Store your medication in a clean, dry area at room temperature. Keep all medication out of the reach of children.

### **Some nondrug methods to help you sleep include:**

1. Avoid taking caffeine-containing drinks or foods (e.g., chocolate) or heavy meals within 4 hours before bedtime. A warm glass of milk before bedtime is effective for some people.
2. Napping and sleeping during the day will make restful sleep at night difficult. Keep active during the day and exercise regularly.
3. Engage in relaxing activities prior to bedtime such as reading, listening to music or taking a warm bath. Strenuous exercise (e.g., jogging) immediately before bedtime may make it difficult to get to sleep.
4. Establish a routine or normal pattern of sleeping and waking.
5. Use the bed and bedroom only for sleep and when you are ill.
6. Minimize external stimulation which might disturb sleep. If necessary, use dark shades over windows or wear earplugs.
7. Once in bed, make sure you are comfortable (i.e., not too hot or cold); use a firm mattress.
8. Relaxation techniques (e.g., muscle relaxation exercises, yoga) may be helpful in decreasing anxiety and promoting sleep.
9. If you have problems getting to sleep, rather than tossing and turning in bed, have some warm milk, read a book, listen to music or try relaxation techniques until you again begin to feel tired.
10. Don't worry about the amount of sleep you are getting as the amount will vary from day to day. The more you worry the more anxious you will get and this may make it harder for you to fall asleep.

**If you have any questions regarding this medication, please ask your doctor, pharmacist, or nurse.**