

Guide to Sleep Medications

Brand Name (Generic Name)	How It Works	Pros	Cons
Nonprescription Sleep Aids			
Benadryl, Nytol, Tylenol PM, Sominex, Sleep-Eze (diphenhydramine), Nyquil (doxylamine and alcohol)	Contain antihistamines that make you drowsy	Over-the-counter	Not intended for long-term use; can cause morning grogginess, reduce sleep quality by reducing REM sleep. Side effects may include dry mouth, dizziness, disturbed coordination
Prescription Sleep Aids: Benzodiazepines			
Restoril (temazepam), Dalmane (flurazepan), Halcion (triazolam), ProSom (estazolam), Doral (quazepam)	Enhance efficiency of gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA), brain chemical that slows transmission of alertness-promoting messages, causing sedation, muscle relaxation and decreased anxiety.	Effective in inducing sleep; reduce anxiety	Addictive if used too long; potential for morning hangover; rebound insomnia, combination with alcohol can be fatal. Side effects may include impaired memory and movement, dizziness, heartburn, diarrhea, and in rare cases—sleep eating and sleep driving.
Prescription Sleep Aids: Nonbenzodiazepines			
Ambien/Ambien CR (zolpidem), Sonata (zaleplon), Lunesta (eszopiclone)	Increase sleep-inducing effects of GABA	More effective, shorter acting and safer for long-term use than benzodiazepines; also less severe side effects	May lead to addiction if used too long; rebound insomnia. Side effects may include headaches, dizziness, daytime drowsiness and, in rare cases, sleep eating and sleep driving.
Prescription Sleep Aids: Melatonin-Receptor Agonists			
Rozerem (ramelteon)	Induces sleep by acting on melatonin receptors in the brain	Non-narcotic; effective for those with sleep-onset insomnia	May exacerbate symptoms of depression. Side effects may include drowsiness, dizziness, upset stomach, change in way food tastes (more research needed)
Prescription Sleep Aids: Sedating Antidepressants			
Elavil, Endep (amitriptyline), Sinequan (doxepin), Desyrel (trazodone)	Depression treatments with sedative side effects	Non-narcotic; effective for those with sleep-onset insomnia	Effectiveness not proven; often cause side effects including dizziness, dry mouth, upset stomach, weight gain, and sexual dysfunction
Natural Remedies: Melatonin			
	Artificial or animal form of natural hormone produced in brain that helps regulate sleep-wake cycle	Can be helpful in treating biological-clock related sleep problems like jet lag.	Not proven to be effective; not well-regulated so no quality control; effectiveness is very timing-specific
Natural Remedies: Herbal			
Valerian, chamomile, lavender, lemon balm, kava kava, passionflower	Contains compounds thought to promote sleep	Natural	Safety and effectiveness not proven; not regulated so no quality control; kava and valerian have been linked to liver damage