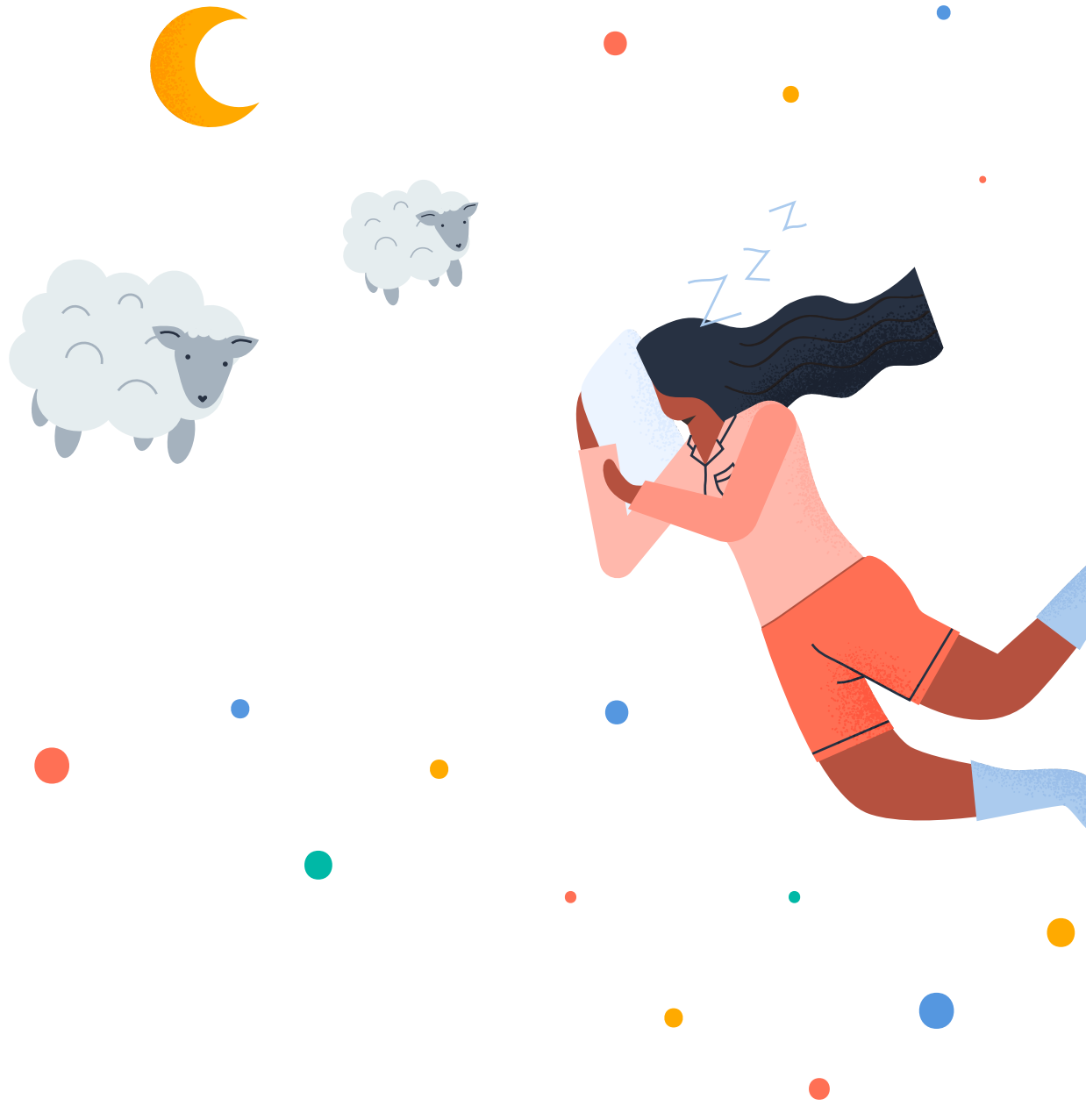


**honeybee**

# The Comprehensive Guide to Better Sleep

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Data from a  
2018 survey by the  
CDC shows that  
34.5% of adults got  
inadequate sleep.

In other words, insomnia—i.e. difficulty with falling asleep and/or staying asleep—was a struggle for our country already. Now add in a global health crisis, record-high rates of unemployment, and strict social distancing measures and you don't exactly have the ideal prescription for feeling well-rested.

All across the United States, people are reporting [strange dreams](#), increased [sleep disturbances](#), and [higher levels](#) of anxiety and stress. This has led many to experience what we're calling "pandemic-induced insomnia," an unfortunate additional side effect of the COVID-19 pandemic.

A lack of quality sleep can have serious consequences on both physical and mental health. Sleep specifically [impacts the immune system](#), which is essential for fighting off viruses and other illnesses.

Luckily, there are a wide range of options you can try to improve your sleep. As pharmacists at the online pharmacy [Honeybee Health](#), we've received countless questions from patients asking for help. So, we decided to research and compile a comprehensive guide to falling asleep and staying that way. This includes everything from lifestyle changes to over-the-counter supplements to prescription medications. We suggest trying lifestyle changes and supplements and over-the-counter medications first before exploring the prescription medication options.

# Lifestyle Changes

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This section focuses on “[sleep hygiene](#),” which includes habits and practices that help you sleep better long-term. Many of these might take weeks or even months to improve your sleep, so this section definitely takes some patience! However, these are important steps you can try before reaching for prescription or even over-the-counter medications.





## JOURNALING

Stress and anxiety are [known sleep killers](#). Journaling is one method that can help dispel some of these emotions from your brain before bed, allowing you to both fall asleep faster and hopefully avoid bad dreams. Writing for as little as five minutes can positively affect your sleep.

In particular, writing about feelings and stressors is [believed](#) to free up your brain for other things, like going to sleep or taking on a new day. Your brain is like a computer. If there are too many thoughts or programs going on at once, it's difficult to get things done. Journaling allows your brain to close some of those apps so you can move on to other things.

## SLEEPING NAKED

The time it takes for you to transition from awake to asleep affects the quality of your sleep overall. If you have a hard time falling asleep quickly, it might be because [your body temperature is too high](#). Cooling yourself off before bed can help—and that's where sleeping naked comes in.

Sleeping naked can help regulate your internal temperature, keeping you cool under your sheets. It'll also prevent you from needing to take off layers in the middle of the night. Along these lines, it can be helpful to cool your room down by opening a window or turning on a fan or AC. The ideal temperature for sleep is between [60 and 67 degrees](#).

## LIMITING SCREEN TIME

There's a reason the phrase is, "Lights out." Lighting plays a huge role in how fast you fall asleep at night because it [impacts](#) the production of melatonin in our body. Melatonin is a hormone that controls our circadian rhythm, our sleep and wake cycle.

Around two hours before bedtime, dim the lights in your room, and stay away from anything too bright. It's also key to avoid blue light as much as possible, which is why it's recommended to put away your phone and other screens.

If you're accustomed to watching tv or scrolling through social media before bed, try reading a book, journaling (see above), or anything else that is relaxing and off-screen instead.

Light can also affect how awake you feel in the morning. To make sure you don't wake up too early, close your curtains or wear an eye mask while asleep. When you first wake up, try going on a brisk 10 - 15 minute walk outside. Soaking in sunlight tells your body it's daytime. If you can't get natural light, you can also use bright bedroom lights.

## CONSISTENT SLEEP SCHEDULE

Going to bed and waking up at roughly the same time every day is an [important](#) part of sleep hygiene. By keeping a schedule, you're training your body when to feel alert and drowsy.

In the beginning, it might help to set two alarms on your phone—one reminding you to go to bed, and one for

waking up. Over time, you'll reset your internal alarm clock and you'll find yourself feeling sleepy and alert at the right times even without a phone alarm.

And yes, for this to work it means sticking to your schedule, even on weekends (it'll be worth it in the long run!).

## FOODS AND DRINKS TO AVOID

What you eat before bed can impact how quickly you fall asleep, whether you wake up during the night, and even the types of dreams you have.

If you eat shortly before going to sleep, your body will end up digesting your food while you're trying to sleep. This effect on your metabolism increases your body temperature, potentially increasing your brain activity during the stages of sleep in which you have the most vivid dreams. Some believe this can lead to having more [disturbing dreams](#).

In particular, [spicy](#) meals and meals high in [carbs or fat](#) shortly before bed are associated with poor sleep quality. Additionally, these heavy meals right before bed could cause stomach discomfort and acid reflux. However, you also don't want to go to bed hungry, so don't skip dinner either.

Some studies suggest that milk, fish, fruit, and vegetables can promote better sleep, but this effect hasn't been studied enough to draw firm conclusions.

We also suggest limiting your liquid consumption before

bed so that you don't have to wake up for the bathroom in the middle of the night. While a glass of wine before bed may help you relax and fall asleep faster, it could also [disrupt](#) your sleep quality later on during the night. Not only does drinking more make this effect worse, but alcohol consumption can also suppress your body's melatonin production, throwing off your sleep cycle.

Lastly, try to avoid caffeine, nicotine, and sugar as these substances are stimulants that wake up your brain. In addition to making falling asleep hard, they can also prevent you from reaching [the deepest stage of sleep](#).

## STRATEGIC NAPS

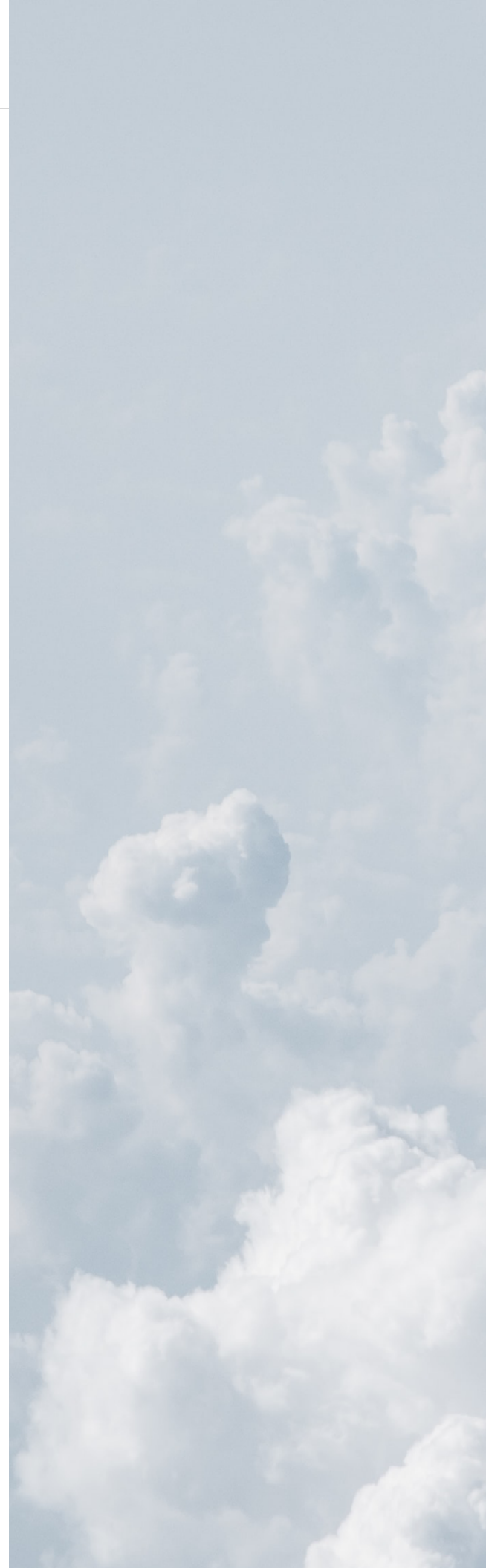
Napping can be a great way to perk yourself up during the day. However, you have to be careful about when and how long you nap for.

Avoid napping close to bedtime since this can make it harder for you to fall asleep later. When it comes to how long, naps over 90 minutes will likely affect sleep quality, and habitually taking long naps may have long-term [health risks](#).

## EXERCISE

Regular exercise has a wide range of health benefits, including improved sleep. Even getting some exercise in the evening before bed can help you sleep [more deeply](#).

Just make sure you're not over-doing it. Vigorous exercise right before bed may make it harder to fall asleep and lead to waking up more frequently during the night.



## BEHAVIORAL THERAPY

The American College of Physicians [recommends](#) that those with insomnia first pursue cognitive behavioral therapy for insomnia (CBT-I) before considering medications. CBT-I typically includes regular discussions with a clinician who helps you adjust your sleep hygiene and develop good habits to improve your sleep patterns.

These days, you don't necessarily need to go to a doctor's office to have these visits. CBT-I can also take place over phone calls, websites, or phone apps, and self-help books are also available. Keep in mind: this approach isn't an instant fix. It often takes weeks of adjusting your habits until you see results. But once you make it through that process, your improved sleep will probably last longer than it would with a prescription medication.

Even if you don't technically have insomnia, behavioral

therapy may still help. For instance, if you're one of [the 1 in 5 adults with anxiety issues](#), you might get stuck in a loop: anxiety can lead to poor sleep quality, and poor sleep quality can lead to more anxiety. In situations like this, cognitive behavioral therapy can address one of the big sources of your sleep issues and improve other parts of your life as well.

## MEDITATION AND DEEP BREATHING

Meditation and deep breathing are two free, effective strategies that you can use from the comfort of your own home to help you sleep. They have even been scientifically studied: sleep quality was improved in people who practiced [mindfulness meditation](#) or deep breathing [with](#) or [without](#) aromatherapy. Not sure where to start? There are quite a few [free phone apps](#) you can try out.



## SOOTHING SOUNDS

Sounds can interrupt your sleep, decreasing the quality.

White noise is one option for blocking out sounds.

There are some free phone apps that play white noise playlists as you fall asleep. A fan or peaceful music can also work.

Although it hasn't gone through much scientific investigation, [studies](#) have found that white noise helps people get to sleep faster. The sleep benefits of white noise have been observed for centuries; white noise machines have been around since the [1600s](#)!

Besides white noise, you can also use earplugs.

# Supplements and Over-the-Counter Medications

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In this section, we cover the many supplements, herbal remedies, and over-the-counter medications that might help with sleep. Even though these are all-natural remedies, you should still consult a doctor to make sure they don't interfere with any other medications you take or health conditions you have.



## HERBAL TEAS

While there are not as many studies focused on herbal remedies, many of them [show promise](#) for reducing stress and promoting better sleep naturally.

Here is an overview of the different types:

- **Passionflower tea:** [helps with](#) both falling asleep and staying asleep.
- **Valerian root tea:** [some studies](#) have found that this herb can help you sleep deeper without any “hangover” effects or grogginess the next day. It seems to work the best once you have taken it consistently for [at least two weeks](#).
- **Lavender tea:** a [mild sedative](#) that promotes deeper and more restful sleep, especially in women.
- **Chamomile tea:** another [mild sedative](#) that had a calming effect and improved sleep quality.
- **Lemon balm tea:** [potentially](#) acts as a sedative as well.
- **Magnolia tea:** might make you [feel sleepier](#), helping you fall asleep faster.
- **Kava tea:** shown to have [sedative and anti-anxiety effects](#). However, with this remedy especially you should consult with a doctor. There have been cases of [liver damage](#) and other dangerous side effects associated with kava.

If you find that these teas do not work for you, it might be worth trying these herbs in supplement or extract form instead as that will be a much stronger concentration.



## MELATONIN

Melatonin is a popular over-the-counter choice for insomnia. It is a [naturally-occurring hormone](#) in your body that helps regulate when you feel sleepy and when you feel awake. Generally when used to treat insomnia, the recommended starting dose is 3 - 5 mg. It can go up to 10 mg, but there is a risk of drowsiness the next day. The correct dose also varies from person to person and depending on the severity of their insomnia.

The sustained release option is a great choice because it slowly releases throughout the night, helping you stay asleep rather than just fall asleep. If you want something that is faster acting, then you can also take melatonin as a sublingual dissolvable tablet or drop.

Keep in mind that it can take a few weeks for melatonin



to start working. While it is much less likely for you to become dependent on melatonin compared to prescription sleeping pills, it can lose its effectiveness over time if used too frequently. This is because your brain can build up a tolerance to it.

## TRYPTOPHAN

Tryptophan is an amino acid that your body uses to help create serotonin, a neurotransmitter that is then connected to [sleep and melatonin levels](#). It is found in turkey, which is what started the popular belief that a Thanksgiving meal will make you sleepy. It's also the basis of the "warm glass of milk before bed" trick.

While [turkey](#) and [milk](#) are unlikely to be sleep aids, Tryptophan has been shown to help with sleep when taken in concentrated doses as a supplement. Specifically, it can [promote sleepiness](#) and help you fall asleep faster. There is less evidence that it can help you stay asleep longer.

## GAMMA-AMINOBUTYRIC ACID (GABA)

Gamma-aminobutyric acid, a chemical naturally found in many foods, plays an important role in your brain. It is responsible for blocking some forms of communication [between nerve cells](#).

GABA plays a significant role in your central nervous system, and it is well established that activating certain types of GABA receptors in the brain can help you sleep. In fact, many prescription treatments for sleep issues target the GABA receptors in the brain.

Studies have shown that taking 300 mg of GABA as a supplement daily can help you both fall asleep faster and stay asleep throughout the night. Participants in the study only experienced some mild side effects, including stomach discomfort and headaches. There were also fewer cases of [daytime drowsiness](#) than generally reported with typical sleep sedatives.



# Vitamins and Minerals

The relationship between vitamins and minerals (otherwise known as micronutrients) and sleep has been scientifically studied but needs more exploration before we can draw strong conclusions. Some studies have shown a potential connection between certain micronutrients and various brain chemicals involved in sleep, including both serotonin and melatonin. However, results of these studies have sometimes been inconsistent.

If you are struggling with sleep, it may help to review these suggestions about meal choices and vitamin supplements.

## VITAMINS

Vitamin D is the vitamin most commonly administered as a sleep aid. It primarily plays a role in bone health and immune function. Additionally, some studies have shown that this vitamin may also help regulate mood and sleep. Extensive reviews of scientific literature have linked higher levels of vitamin D to improved sleep, along with linking deficiencies of this nutrient to sleeping disorders.

The easiest way to get more vitamin D is to step out in the sunlight. Additionally, fatty fish and fish oils, egg yolks, and some fortified foods like dairy or juice can provide a vitamin D boost.

It is theorized that vitamin B-6—a nutrient found in dairy products, carrots, spinach, bananas, and potatoes—may act as a sleep aid

because it is involved in the production of serotonin and melatonin. Anecdotal evidence has shown that B-6 can make dreams seem more vivid and help you remember your dreams once you wake up. However, Vitamin B-6 may not have a significant impact on other aspects of sleep quality, and some people taking vitamin B complex supplements reported worse sleep quality.


Vitamin B-12, found in animal protein, mainly helps with cardiovascular health and brain function. Investigations of its role in regulating sleep have been mixed: some studies link B-12 deficiencies with insomnia while others link increased B-12 intake to decreased sleep quality.

## MINERALS

Among the mineral supplements, magnesium is the most commonly used as a sleep aid. Additionally, phosphorus, iron, zinc, and selenium may play a role in sleep; deficiencies of these have been associated with higher rates of inadequate sleep.

Despite a lack of extensive research, improved sleep seems to be most consistently linked to getting enough magnesium, iron, and zinc in your diet.

The best foods for getting more of these minerals include:

- **Phosphorus:** dairy products, fish, meat, and poultry
  - **Magnesium:** dark, leafy greens, nuts, whole grains, soy, and bananas
  - **Iron:** meat, poultry, eggs, and whole grains
  - **Zinc:** oysters, shellfish, meat, and poultry
  - **Selenium:** nuts, fish, poultry, and dairy products
- 



## CANNABIDIOL (CBD)

CBD is one of the many chemical compounds found in cannabis. Unlike tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), CBD has little, if any, psychoactive effect. So far, there is only one FDA-approved CBD product, Epidiolex, which is used to treat two severe forms of epilepsy.

Varieties of cannabis containing only trace amounts of THC are classified as “hemp.” These types of plants are used to produce CBD. On the other hand, varieties of cannabis with higher concentrations of THC are classified as “marijuana.”

The legality of cannabis products, including CBD, is complicated. Laws differ among states, between state and federal levels, among potential uses for the product, and between CBD derived from hemp versus marijuana. If you’re interested in using CBD for sleep, you’ll need to look up the laws in your state.

Because the legalization of cannabis products is a

relatively recent development, few studies so far directly address how CBD impacts sleep. Initial research shows that it holds [promise](#) as a treatment for insomnia, and it has also improved sleep quality in patients undergoing CBD treatment for other conditions like multiple sclerosis and chronic pain.

CBD can be administered in many ways, including

- **Sublingual drops:** placed under the tongue.
- **Edibles:** cooked with foods.
- **Smoking:** inhaled using a cigarette or pipe.
- **Vaping:** inhaled using an e-cigarette. This allows users to inhale the chemicals in an aerosol form without tobacco smoke, although it still contains some dangerous chemicals.

If you have trouble *falling* asleep, vaping may be the best solution for you, as it gets the CBD into your system within around 15 minutes. On the other hand, if

you have trouble staying asleep, the slower-release alternatives of capsules or edibles may be the choice for you. The effects of CBD typically last from 2 to 6 hours.

In terms of the dosage, there are no hard-and-fast guidelines to how much CBD will be best for you. Different people respond differently to CBD. So it's usually recommended to start with a low dose on the first night, then slowly increase the dose on following nights until your sleep improves.

It is also not clear how long the benefits of CBD as a sleep aid may last. Some reports claim that sleep was improved in the first month of CBD treatment, but the effects wore off in the second and third months.

Safety is a critical concern when it comes to obtaining CBD as a potential sleep aid. Similar to regulations of dietary supplements, the FDA does not rigorously monitor manufacturers and distributors of CBD products. As a result, you may not get what you pay for, and the consequences of that could be dangerous. A [2017 investigation](#) of CBD products purchased online found that over two-thirds of those products were mislabeled for the true dose of CBD contained.

Before purchasing a CBD product, check the distributor's website. It is best to buy from a company that has been around for at least 3 years, can provide a Certificate of Analysis (COA; describes results of tests for CBD, THC, and contaminant content), can provide the batch number of the product (and that batch number matches the COA), sources its hemp from the United States, and has a customer support team. The label on the product should specify instructions for its use



with proper dosing, production and/or expiration date, storage instructions, and warnings regarding improper use. If the product you're looking at doesn't fit that description, there are plenty of other brands to consider.

## ANTIHISTAMINES

Many OTC sleep aids include diphenhydramine (Benadryl, ZzzQuil, Unisom SleepGels, Sominex) or doxylamine (Unisom SleepTabs). While these options are very common, there are [mixed views](#) on how much they help.

Antihistamines may help you fall asleep, but you also may feel drowsy the next day. This is because antihistamines block chemical receptors in the brain that play a role in wakefulness, and this effect can last into the

next morning. As a result, drowsiness and fatigue are the most common side effects of these medications. In rare cases, antihistamines make some people feel more awake, rather than helping them fall asleep.

These medications may be taken about 30 minutes before bed, and do not need to be taken with food.

Before taking these antihistamines, check the warning label. These drugs should not be taken with alcohol. You should consult with your doctor before using these if you are pregnant or have glaucoma, enlarged prostate, or a breathing problem like asthma. Due to potential drug interactions, talk to your doctor before using doxylamine if you are taking sedatives or tranquilizers. Before using diphenhydramine, talk to your doctor if you are taking any other medication.



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# Prescription Medications

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In this section, we've broken down all of the options you have for prescription sleeping aids—everything from cannabis to muscle relaxers to sleep-specific drugs. All of these medications require a prescription from a doctor (except for cannabis, depending on where you live).

As with any medication, it is up to you, your doctor, and your pharmacist to weigh whether the benefits outweigh the risks. This is especially true for prescription sleeping aids, some of which can be addictive with serious side effects. Even if a drug is considered non-addictive, overuse and dependence is still possible from a psychological perspective. Additionally, this is not a substitute for medical advice.

If you are taking other medications, we recommend using a [drug interaction checking tool](#) to see if your medications can lead to negative interactions with these sleep aids.

To help you get a sense of how the various options differ, we've generally organized this section along a spectrum from least to most habit-forming medications. Typically, with all sleep aids, the goal is to take them for the shortest duration possible.

*MEDICAL DISCLAIMER: This article is **not** a substitute for medical advice. All of the recommendations below are specific for adults, not children or adolescents. This information is a reference resource designed to supplement the expertise and judgment of healthcare practitioners. It is always important to get the advice of a healthcare professional before starting or changing any medical routine, including prescription medications, supplements, vitamins, and non-prescription medications such as over-the-counter drugs. This is especially important for sleep problems given that insomnia can be caused by an underlying health condition that requires the medical expertise of a doctor and/or pharmacist.*

# Non-controlled Substances

These options tend to be less habit-forming and addictive than the controlled substance options for prescription sleeping aids. That being said, with all sleeping aids, the ideal is to not be on them for extended periods of time. Since these medications are not controlled, they can be purchased at most retail and online pharmacies.

## RAMELTEON (ROZEREM)

Ramelteon is a sleeping medication that helps you if you have trouble falling asleep. It works in a similar way to melatonin by affecting sleep regulation mechanisms within the brain.

Unlike some other sleep aids, this drug is not addictive and does not cause withdrawal symptoms. That means it can be used for long-term treatment of insomnia, helping to regulate your circadian rhythms.

### How to use

Ramelteon is a tablet taken 30 minutes before bedtime. It will make you sleepy quickly, so only take it at bedtime

when you know you can sleep for at least 7 - 8 hours.

You should have an easier time falling asleep within 7 - 10 days of taking ramelteon.

It should not be taken with food or shortly after a meal, especially a high-fat meal, as this can interfere with the absorption of the medication. Specifically, do not eat grapefruit or drink grapefruit juice while taking this medication. Grapefruit blocks the enzyme that helps your body break down this medication. Mixing grapefruit and ramelteon can lead to dangerously high levels of the drug in your system, potentially resulting in blood poisoning.



### Side effects, drug interactions, and warnings

Ramelteon can cause dizziness and daytime drowsiness. Some more serious side effects can result in difficulty breathing, nausea, swelling of the throat or tongue, irregular periods, and other reproductive-related issues and changes in your behavior or mental health (full list [here](#)). It can interact with other medications, including vitamins, supplements, antifungals, antidepressants, and anti-seizure medications (full list [here](#)).

Since it makes you drowsy, do not operate machinery or drive until you are aware of how the drug affects you. Additionally, some patients have reported sleepwalking (with no later memory of their actions) while on this medication. Tell your doctor straight away if this happens to you.

Drinking alcohol can increase the risk of serious side effects. This medication is not recommended for anyone who is pregnant, planning on becoming pregnant or breastfeeding. It should be used with caution with patients who have depression, worsening depression, or suicidal ideation; respiratory conditions; COPD; and sleep apnea.

### DOXEPIN (SINEQUAN)

Doxepin is a type of medication called a tricyclic antidepressant. It slows down brain activity, helping you stay asleep better.

While this is an option, it is not commonly prescribed anymore because it is an older class of antidepressants. However, we've still included it for your information.



### How to use

When used to treat insomnia, doxepin is taken as a tablet once a day, 30 minutes before you go to sleep. It's also important to wait three hours after your last meal (especially if it contained high-fat foods) before you take it, or else you might feel groggy the next day.

You will feel the effects very quickly, so you truly should only take it when you're ready for bed. Make sure you'll be able to sleep for at least the next 7 - 8 hours.

Many patients see improvement in their sleep within the first couple of days of taking the medication. Talk to your doctor if doxepin still hasn't worked after 7 - 10 days.

Do not stop taking this medication without consulting your doctor. It is often important to slowly reduce your dose of an antidepressant to reduce the risk of withdrawal symptoms and to track any possible re-emerging symptoms.

### Side effects, drug interactions, and warnings

This medication can interact with other drugs such as other antidepressants, vitamins, supplements, allergy medications, and cold medications (full list [here](#)).

Some possible side effects are nausea and dizziness (full list [here](#)). Some people have also reported sleep walking while taking doxepin.

It has also been reported that without being fully awake, people who took doxepin did things such as driving their car, cooking, having sex, and making phone calls. Doxepin has also been known to increase the risk of suicide and suicidal thinking in some children and young adults.

Tell your doctor if you are pregnant, planning on becoming pregnant, or breastfeeding. Like other medications that make you drowsy, you should not drive a car or operate machinery when this drug is in effect. Alcohol can also increase the side effects of doxepin.

### TRAZODONE (DESYREL)

Trazodone is an antidepressant medication used to increase the amount of serotonin in your brain. Because this drug promotes sleep, it is usually prescribed to patients with insomnia in addition to anxiety or depression.

While it can be habit-forming, it is less addictive than controlled sleeping aids such as Zolpidem (Ambien). It is typically prescribed in the short term to decrease the number of times you wake up in the night and to



improve your sleep quality overall. However, it is usually only prescribed to patients who also have anxiety or depression.

It's important to note that while the U.S. National Library of Medicine lists the treatment of insomnia as a use of trazodone, The American Academy of Sleep does not.

#### **How to use**

Trazodone is a tablet taken at bedtime on an empty stomach. Only take this medication when you are sure you can sleep for at least 7 - 8 hours. Do not take this medication with grapefruit or grapefruit juice.

It can take up to two weeks for trazodone to start helping you sleep. Your doctor might start you on a lower dose and then gradually increase it until it is effective as a sleep aid.

Do not stop taking this medication without consulting your doctor. It is often important to slowly reduce your dose of an antidepressant to reduce the risk of withdrawal symptoms and to track any possible re-emerging symptoms.

#### **Side effects, drug interactions, and warnings**

This medication can interact with other medications, including blood thinners, antidepressants, supplements, over-the-counter pain medications, and allergy medications (full list [here](#)). Possible side effects include headache, nausea, vomiting, bad taste in your mouth, and nightmares (full list [here](#)).

One serious side effect found in a small number of children, teenagers, and young adults was increased suicidal thinking while taking antidepressants such as trazodone.

Tell your doctor if you are pregnant, plan on becoming pregnant, or are breastfeeding while taking trazodone.

Do not drive a car or operate machinery until you are aware of how trazodone affects you, as it may make you drowsy and lead to poor judgment. Additionally, trazodone side effects can be made worse by alcohol, so speak to a doctor first.



# Controlled Substances

Controlled substances are medications that are regulated by the government, specifically because they carry a greater risk for abuse and addiction. There are five different categories for controlled substances—schedule I through schedule V. Schedule I controlled substances represent one end of the spectrum, and they are considered to have the highest potential for abuse. Schedule V controlled substances still have the potential for abuse, but they are considered to be the least addictive compared to schedule I.

Most sleeping medications are schedule IV. This is defined by the DEA as, “drugs, substances, or chemicals ... with a low potential for abuse and low risk of dependence.”

Since the below prescription medications are controlled substances, they can only be purchased at retail pharmacies and certain online pharmacies.

## TETRAHYDROCANNABINOL (THC)

Although it has been illegal at the federal level since 1970 and considered a Schedule I substance, prescription use of products made from cannabis (the group of plants containing hemp and marijuana) is legal in 33 states and the District of Columbia. An additional 14 states have legalized the medical use of cannabis products, but with a limit on the allowed amount of THC in the product. Each state has its own list of conditions for which medical cannabis products have been approved. To find this list for your state, you can consult [Leafly](#) or your state’s “.gov” website.

THC is the main psychoactive component of cannabis





products, activating chemical receptors in the central nervous system, and the immune system. These receptors are involved in regulating mood, appetite, and pain, among other processes. While products derived from hemp contain CBD and only trace amounts of THC, marijuana products contain a higher concentration of THC, leading to a “high” sensation.

The uses of THC and medical marijuana have been investigated in numerous clinical trials, usually as a secondary effect in studies on multiple sclerosis, chronic pain, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). These studies have shown [improvements](#) in patients’ sleep, but more studies directly addressing impacts on sleep are required to draw strong conclusions.

The amount of cannabis or THC used for medical purposes is not believed to lead to withdrawal symptoms or permanent psychological damage in adults. However, adolescents may be more susceptible to

psychological damage from long-term use.

#### How to use

Marijuana products, which contain THC, may be administered in a variety of ways, including

- **Sublingual drops:** placed under the tongue.
- **Edibles:** cooked with foods.
- **Smoking:** inhaled using a cigarette or pipe.
- **Vaping:** inhaled using an e-cigarette. This allows users to inhale the chemicals in an aerosol form without tobacco smoke, although it still contains some dangerous chemicals.

The most common methods for helping you fall asleep are sublingual (under the tongue) tinctures, smoking, or vaping. Edible versions may not be ideal because it can take longer for you to feel the effects of those, and those effects may last longer than with the other



methods.

There are many strains of medical cannabis products, and these can have uplifting and energizing effects or calming effects. Different people may have different experiences with these products, so it may take some experimentation to find the right strain and dose for you. You should likely start at a very low dose and work your way up as necessary, and try this out first on nights when you do not have school or work the next day. Taking too large of a dose may make you feel groggy the following day.

Depending on whether you are using a sublingual, edible, or inhaled product, you may start feeling the effects after 1 hour or up to 3 hours after using the product. How you

take it will also have an effect on how long the effects will last. Often, the effects of these products last for about 3 to 4 hours, but some may have longer-lasting effects.

Because cannabis products may lead to increased appetite or feelings of dry mouth or dry eyes, you may want to have a light snack (see our lifestyle section above), water, and eye drops on hand.

#### **Side effects, drug interactions, and warnings**

Possible short-term side effects of medical marijuana include increased heart rate, dizziness, impaired concentration and memory, slower reaction times, increased appetite, and hallucinations. Long-term side

effects are less clear.

Those taking THC products should not drive or operate heavy machinery while the drug is in their system.

Depending on the dose and method of administration, these products may lead to drowsiness the next day.

Furthermore, the states allowing for medical use of these products may [restrict](#) public use.

Products containing THC are generally not recommended for people with cardiovascular disease, with an anxiety disorder or mood disorder, or who are pregnant or breastfeeding. Those with liver or kidney disease, history of drug abuse, or taking sedatives may be at higher risk for negative side effects or addiction.

It is not clear whether THC leads to negative interactions with other drugs. Some studies have shown potential drug interactions with barbiturates, sedatives, antihistamines, or antidepressants. Limit alcohol use while on THC products; these two chemicals may intensify each other's effects.

#### Where to get it

Be aware that even though many states have lifted some of the restrictions against the use of medical cannabis products, the sale and distribution of such products is still a [serious crime](#) under federal law.

Leafly, the Yelp or Consumer Reports of the cannabis world, provides a [helpful guide](#) to the steps involved in legally obtaining medical cannabis products:

1. Check whether you qualify for medical cannabis

products

2. Obtain a medical cannabis card
3. Find a dispensary
4. Educate yourself on your options
5. Choose and purchase your products.

When obtaining a medical cannabis product at a dispensary, be ready to let the worker know that you are looking for a product to help you sleep, and be ready to ask lots of questions. The person working there should be able to tell you which products may be best to help you fall asleep, how long they take to kick in, and how long the effect may last.

## ESZOPICLONE (LUNESTA)

Eszopiclone is a sleep aid called a hypnotic. Like other sleep medications, it works by slowing down brain activity. It helps with both falling asleep and staying asleep.

Eszopiclone is a schedule IV controlled substance, meaning there is potential for addiction and abuse.

#### How to use

Eszopiclone is a tablet taken at bedtime. It can also be taken after you try falling asleep but can't. It will affect you quickly, so only take it right before bed and when you know you can sleep for at least 7 - 8 hours.

It might take some trial and error before your doctor finds the right dose for you. Once the right dose is found, your sleep should improve within 7 - 10 days.

Do not stop taking the drug without consulting a doctor first. When/if your doctor instructs you to stop taking eszopiclone, you might find it's harder to fall asleep. Don't worry—this usually gets better after a few nights.

Do not take this drug with a high-fat meal. Lastly, do not drink grapefruit juice or eat grapefruit while taking this drug as it interferes with absorption.

### **Side effects, drug interactions, and warnings**

Eszopiclone can cause headaches, pain, daytime drowsiness, unusual dreams, and unexpected changes in your mental health (full list [here](#)). This medication can also cause life-threatening sleepwalking behaviors. Some people have reported doing everything from driving their cars to cooking to having sex while unaware. When they woke up, they often had no memory of what they had done.

Eszopiclone can interact with vitamins, supplements, antidepressants, antifungals, anti-seizure meds, and others (full list [here](#)). The risk of side effects is higher if you drink alcohol or take street drugs while on this medication.

Tell your doctor if you are pregnant, planning on becoming pregnant, or breastfeeding before taking this drug.

Since this medication will make you drowsy, do not drive or operate machinery until you are sure you are alert enough to do so.



## FLURAZEPAM (DALMANE)

Flurazepam is a benzodiazepine that slows down brain activity to help you both fall asleep and stay asleep. This drug can be addictive, so it is typically used as a short-term treatment only.

### How to use

Flurazepam is a capsule taken at bedtime when you need it. It can sometimes take a few nights for this drug to start working—your sleep should improve by the second or third night. It can also last in your system after you stop taking it for one or two nights. You can take it with or without food.

Overall, flurazepam should improve your sleep within 7 - 10 days.

Do not stop taking this medication without first consulting your doctor in order to prevent withdrawal symptoms.

Do not drink or eat grapefruits while on this medication.

### Side effects, drug interactions, and warnings

This medication interacts with certain vitamins, supplements, allergy medications, opiate medications, antidepressants, and muscle relaxants (full list [here](#)). It can cause side effects such as dizziness, headaches, daytime drowsiness, weakness, and changes in your mental health (full list [here](#)). Do not operate machinery or drive a car until you know how flurazepam affects you. Flurazepam can also cause life-threatening breathing problems, sedation, or coma.

Do not take this medication with alcohol or street drugs, as this can increase your risk of serious side effects. It is also not recommended for anyone who is pregnant, planning on becoming pregnant or breastfeeding. It should be used with caution if you have depression, especially if you have had thoughts of suicide. If this describes you, your doctor will most likely prescribe the smallest dose possible in order to minimize the risk of overdose.

Lastly, some people have reported sleepwalking while on this drug, including driving their cars, cooking, and having sex—without any memory of their actions. If this happens to you, call your doctor right away.

### TEMAZEPAM (RESTORIL)

Temazepam is another benzodiazepine that slows down brain activity to help with both falling asleep and staying asleep.

This medication is used on a short term basis only because it can lead to dependency and is considered a schedule IV controlled substance.

#### How to use

Temazepam is a capsule taken at bedtime. It will quickly make you sleepy, so make sure you'll be able to stay in bed for at least 7 to 8 hours once you take the drug. You can take this drug with or without food.

Your insomnia should improve within 7 to 10 days of starting temazepam.



#### Side effects, drug interactions, and warnings

Temazepam can interact with some vitamins, supplements, antidepressants, antihistamines, opiates, and anti-seizure medications (full list [here](#)). The drug can cause side effects such as dizziness, nausea, nightmares, daytime drowsiness, and changes in your mental health (full list [here](#)).

It can also cause life-threatening complications such as trouble breathing, sedation, or coma.

Drinking alcohol or taking street drugs can increase your risk of serious side effects. Do not operate machinery or drive until you are sure the medication has not inhibited you from doing so safely.

Do not take temazepam if you are pregnant, planning on becoming pregnant, or breastfeeding.

Lastly, some patients have reported sleepwalking while taking temazepam. They had no memory of sleepwalking after waking up. If this describes you, tell your doctor immediately.



## TRIAZOLAM (HALCION)

Triazolam is also a benzodiazepine that reduces activity in the brain, making it easier for you to fall asleep and stay asleep. It is used as a short-term treatment (typically 7 to 10 days) since it can lead to dependence and is considered a schedule IV controlled substance.

### How to use

Triazolam is a tablet taken at bedtime. It is important not to take it with food or shortly after eating, as food can affect how well it works. When taken correctly, the medication works quickly. Only take it when you can stay in bed for the next 7 to 8 hours.

Within 7 to 10 days, triazolam should help your sleep problems. It is usually only taken for this length of time, and it is rarely taken for more than 2 to 3 weeks. This is because the medication loses its effectiveness over time.

Once you do stop taking it (according to your doctor's instructions), you might have trouble falling asleep.

This should only last a few nights.

Do not take this medicine with a meal. Overall, do not eat grapefruit or drink grapefruit juice while taking triazolam.

### Side effects, drug interactions, and warnings

Triazolam can interact with vitamins, supplements, opiates, antibiotics, antidepressants, antihistamines, and antifungal medications (full list [here](#)). It can cause side effects such as dizziness, headaches, daytime drowsiness, nightmares, and changes in your mental health (full list [here](#)).

Triazolam can also cause serious breathing problems, sedation, and coma. Some people have reported sleepwalking while taking triazolam. Do not drive or operate machinery until you know how this drug affects you.



Life-threatening side effects are more likely if you drink alcohol or use street drugs while on this medication. It is not recommended for anyone who is pregnant, planning on becoming pregnant or breastfeeding.

## ZALEPLON (SONATA)

Zaleplon is a type of sleep aid called a hypnotic, which slows down brain activity to help you fall asleep. It is a schedule IV controlled substance that can be a habit-forming medication. Therefore, it is typically used only on a short-term basis.

### How to use

Zaleplon is a capsule taken at bedtime when you are unable to fall asleep. It should not be taken with or soon after a high-fat meal because this will interfere with absorption. Only take it at bedtime when you can sleep for 7 - 8 hours, as this medication will begin to work quickly.

After using zaleplon for 7 to 10 days, you should have an easier time falling asleep and your sleep should improve. Do not suddenly stop taking it without consulting a doctor, as this can result in withdrawal symptoms.

Once you do stop taking it, the first few nights might be harder for you to fall asleep. This effect should disappear by the second night.

### Side effects, drug interactions, and warnings

This medication might not be suitable when combined with some vitamins, supplements, antihistamines, cold medicines, pain medications, and antidepressants (full list [here](#)). It can cause side effects like dizziness, numbness, headache, eye pain, daytime drowsiness, and changes in mental health (full list [here](#)). Do not drive or operate machinery until you know how zaleplon affects you.

Some people have reported sleepwalking, including driving cars, cooking, having sex, and other activities.

Do not drink alcohol or use street drugs when on this medication, as it can cause worse side effects. Zolpidem is not recommended for anyone who is pregnant, planning on becoming pregnant or breastfeeding.

### ZOLPIDEM (AMBIEN, EDLUAR, INTERMEZZO, ZOLPIMIST)

Zolpidem is a sedative-hypnotic that slows down brain activity, helping you both fall asleep and stay asleep.

This drug can be addictive and is typically prescribed as a short-term treatment only. It is a schedule IV controlled substance.

#### How to use

Zolpidem comes as a tablet, an extended-release tablet, a sublingual tablet (which dissolves under your tongue), and an oral spray. The tablet (both immediate and extended release) is the most popular and affordable form of zolpidem.

The tablet, extended-release tablet, and oral spray options are taken as needed right before bed-time. The sublingual tablets are taken if you wake up in the middle of the night and can't go back to sleep. All of the options for zolpidem work faster if taken apart from food.

Zolpidem works quickly. For the tablet, extended-release tablet, and oral spray, only take them at bedtime when you know you can remain in bed for 7 to 8 hours. For the sublingual tablet, only take it if you know you

can stay in bed for at least 4 more hours. However, you cannot take more than one type of zolpidem per night.

Zolpidem should lead to better sleep within 7 to 10 days of you starting the medication. If you take it for 2 weeks or more, the medication might start to lose its effectiveness. Also, do not stop taking it without consulting a doctor.

The first night after you stop taking it, you might have a harder time falling asleep. This effect should resolve within 1 to 2 nights. Do not stop taking this medication without talking to your doctor, as it is recommended to slowly lower your dose in conjunction with cognitive behavioral therapy for insomnia.

#### Side effects, drug interactions, and warnings

Zolpidem can interact with other medications, including vitamins, supplements, antidepressants, and cold medications (full list [here](#)). It can cause joint pain, headaches, daytime drowsiness, unusual dreams, and mental illness (full list [here](#)). Sleepwalking is also a possible dangerous side effect of this medication.

Do not drink alcohol or use street drugs while taking zolpidem. It is not recommended for anyone pregnant, planning on becoming pregnant, or breastfeeding. It should be used with caution for anyone with depression, worsening depression, or thoughts of suicide. If that describes you, your doctor will most likely prescribe the lowest dose possible in order to reduce the risk of overdose.

Additionally, do not drive or operate machinery until you know how zolpidem affects you.

## SUVOREXANT (BELSOMRA)

Suvorexant is an orexin receptor antagonist that blocks the natural substance in your brain that makes you feel awake. It can help with either falling asleep or staying asleep.

This is used as a short-term treatment typically because it can be habit-forming. It is a schedule IV controlled substance.

### How to use

Suvorexant is a tablet taken 30 minutes or less before bedtime. You can take it with food if you want, but it works faster on an empty stomach.

Like other sleeping aids, suvorexant will make you sleepy quickly, so make sure you'll be able to remain in bed for at least 7 to 8 hours. Your sleep problems should improve within 7 - 10 days.

Do not eat grapefruit or drink grapefruit juice while on this medication.

### Side effects, drug interactions, and warnings

Suvorexant can interact with vitamins, supplements, antifungal medications, and antidepressants (full list [here](#)). It can cause dizziness, headaches, daytime drowsiness, unusual dreams, and both behavioral and mental health changes (read the full list [here](#)). Some people have also reported sleepwalking.

Do not drink alcohol or use street drugs while taking suvorexant. It is not recommended for anyone pregnant,

planning on becoming pregnant, or breastfeeding without consulting with a doctor. It should be used with caution in patients with depression, worsening depression, or thoughts of suicide.

Lastly, do not drive or operate machinery until you're sure of how suvorexant affects you.

# An Overview of Prescription Sleeping Pills

Drug name	Controlled substance?	Helps fall asleep	Helps stay asleep	Avg. retail cost (generic)	Avg. retail cost (brand)
Ramelteon (Rozerem)	✗	✓	✗	\$393.70	\$535.70
Doxepin (Sinequan)	✗	✗	✓	\$18.80	n/a
Trazodone (Desyrel)	✗	✓	✗	\$14.39	n/a
Eszopiclone (Lunesta)	✓	✓	✓	\$230.18	\$571.37
Flurazepam (Dalmane)	✓	✓	✓	\$24.92	n/a
Temazepam (Restoril)	✓	✓	✓	\$24.93	\$1,156.37
Triazolam (Halcion)	✓	✓	✓	\$106.30	\$210.25
Zaleplon (Sonata)	✓	✓	✗	\$78.43	\$335.71
Zolpidem (Ambien, Edluar, Intermezzo, Zolpimist)	✓	✓	✓	\$52.97	Ambien: \$670.14 Intermezzo: \$385.25
Suvorexant (Belsomra)	✓	✓	✓	n/a	\$439.81

\*All prices listed are for 30-day refills using GoodRx data for average retail prices. Prices are subject to change.  
Even if a drug is not a controlled substance, overuse and dependence are still possible.



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