

Melatonin

Example: Rozerem

Used To Treat: Insomnia

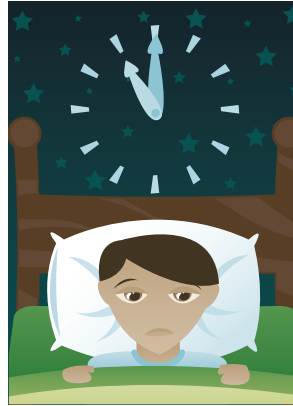
How It Works: Melatonin is produced by the pineal gland. Its production is inhibited by light; permitted by darkness. It is thought to play a role in the circadian rhythm.

Side Effects: None that are harmful. Some say that melatonin may serve as an anti-oxidant and some profess its role in the immune system and in the prevention of cancer. This has yet to be proven.

What is Insomnia?

Sleep is a process usually divided into 5 parts. Stages I-IV and REM. A typical sleep cycle lasts about 90-110 minutes. Most of us have 5-6 cycles per night. REM increases with each cycle so that by the end of the evening, REM sleep dominates sleep. REM sleep seems to be that part of sleep that is most essential for memory. Those people learning something and then going into REM have a much easier time remembering what they learned.

The cycle starts with Stage I and then by REM there is distinct messaging from the brain stem (the pons) to the thalamus and there is almost complete paralysis of motor function. This is important because it is this relaxation that is in part responsible for sleep apnea.



Melatonin



In adults, REM takes up about 20% of the cycle; Stage II takes up 50%. REM is responsible for about 50% of an infant's sleep cycle. Smokers have less REM and their sleep is often interrupted. Alcohol robs most people of REM and sleep. That nightcap is not always about better sleeping.

It seems that the lack of sleep can interfere with the immune system. It is no surprise to you that sickness affects your sleep. In fact the cytokines that the body produces during illness make us sleep.

Our circadian rhythm is actually 25 hours long. This rhythm is highly influenced by light. Remember that melatonin is produced after the pineal gland receives a signal from the pons. The pons also sends signals to the suprachiasmatic nucleus, which sits on the top of the hypothalamus. The SCN nucleus then signals the remainder of the brain.

The lack of sleep may be the source of many other medical problems. The bottom line, you need to sleep. 5-7 hours per night. There are studies about shift work (more accidents). There are studies about our immune system needing sleep. But, the best way to get good sleep is what we call sleep hygiene and it is not about pills. But, if this is the only way, make sure you avail yourself of whatever is available to get a good night's sleep.