



SAN MATEO COUNTY HEALTH

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH & RECOVERY SERVICES

IMPORTANT FACTS ABOUT CONTROLLED SLEEP MEDICATIONS

Sleep medications (like Ambien, Lunesta, and Sonata) have both risks and benefits that you should be aware of before you start taking them. Please talk to your doctor if you have any questions about this information.



Sleep medications (prescribed by your doctor) are risky over time



- Taking sleep medications with alcohol or other sedatives can cause sudden death
- It can take several days for sleep medications to leave your body. If you take it every day, it can cause:
 - problems with memory and concentration
 - higher risk of driving accidents
 - more emergency room visits (for patients taking Ambien)
 - needing more pills over time to be able to sleep (becoming dependent)
- For people 65 and older, sleep medications make it more likely to have falls and brain injuries.
- Sleep medications don't *cure* insomnia. Once you stop taking the medications the insomnia can come back.
- Sleep medications make you get **less** deep sleep and do not help you sleep longer.

Research shows:

- sleep may increase by only about 15 minutes, and can have serious side effects
- these drugs cause people to *not remember being awake* instead of actually being asleep.



Safer ways to take sleep medications

- Take the lowest dose you can
- Do not use more than was prescribed
- Avoid using them daily
- Do not to use them for more than two to four weeks at a time. If you take more than this your body can get used to the medication and will need more for the same effect.



Drug-free treatment that works:

- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for insomnia (CBT-i) is a psychological treatment that requires up to 6 visits. Most people who go through CBT-i can *stop* taking sleep medications *and* maintain good sleep long-term!
 - CBT-i involves looking at negative sleep behaviors and thoughts that cause insomnia, and helps change them into positive sleep behaviors and thoughts that help you sleep
 - CBT-i app: <https://apps.apple.com/us/app/cbt-i-coach/id655918660>



Natural alternatives



- Melatonin is a natural hormone that does not require a prescription and has none of the risks listed above. It can help your brain go into “night-time” mode.
- Mindfulness and relaxation exercises before bed can be helpful.
- Go to bed when feeling sleepy
- Have a regular wake up time
- Staying off your phone, screens for one hour before bedtime

