

Dietary Supplements as Sleep Aids?

Turning to dietary supplements has become a popular choice for sleep aids, but there is still a lot to be learned about these supplements. “Various dietary supplements have been touted as effective insomnia treatments, but there’s much that isn’t known about their effectiveness or safety.”¹ The most widely publicized of these supplements may be the hormone melatonin and the herb valerian.¹

Melatonin

“Melatonin is thought to help control your body’s internal clock. The melatonin supplements most often found in health food stores and pharmacies are synthetic versions of the natural hormone. These supplements are most helpful for people experiencing jet lag or the effects of shift work. They have less and inconsistent effects as a sleep aid. There are many unanswered questions about melatonin. Some people who’ve taken melatonin have reported:

- daytime drowsiness,
- headaches, and
- dizziness.

Other side effects reported include stomach discomfort, short-lasting depression symptoms, mild tremor, mild anxiety, irritability, and confusion.

Melatonin may interact with a variety of common drugs, so talk with your doctor before trying it. The optimal dose isn’t certain, and the long-term effects are unknown.

Melatonin may not be safe if you’re:

- pregnant,
- breast-feeding, or
- younger than age 20.”¹

Valerian

“Supplements made from this plant may reduce the amount of time it takes to fall asleep and help you sleep better. However, it’s not clear what the active ingredient is, and the potencies of various ingredients vary from preparation to preparation. Not all studies have shown the compound to be effective, and there may be some dangers.

Side effects may include:

- headache,
- excitability or uneasiness, and
- heart disturbances.

Valerian may not be safe if you’re pregnant or breast-feeding. Valerian may strongly react with other sleep aids and with alcohol, and it may react with other medications, as well. The optimal dose isn’t certain, and the long-term effects are unknown. Talk to your doctor before taking valerian.”¹

For more information on sleep aids, see the following resources:

- [Melatonin Side Effects: What Are the Risks?](#)
- [OTC Sleep Aids and Supplements: What’s Best and Safe?](#)

Source

1. Mayo Clinic (2007). OTC sleep aids and supplements: What’s best and safe? [on-line]. Retrieved August 5, 2008. From <http://mayoclinic.com/health/sleep-aids/SL00016>

