

## Sleeping Tablets

### Why are doctors reluctant to prescribe sleeping tablets?

Sleeping tablets may cause significant problems, which include:

- ◆ Falls – people taking sleeping tablets have an increased risk of falling and bone fractures such as hip fracture.
- ◆ Accidents – people taking sleeping tablets are at a significantly increased risk of car accidents.
- ◆ Memory and mood problems – such as confusion forgetfulness, aggression and depression.
- ◆ Addiction and dependence – feeling like you need the medicine to carry out day to day activities and/or withdrawal symptoms if you stop or reduce the tablets.
- ◆ Withdrawal – symptoms can include anxiety, irritability, difficulty sleeping, sweating, gastrointestinal symptoms. These are usually mild and usually only last for days to a few weeks.
- ◆ Dementia – there may be an increased risk of developing dementia and Alzheimer's disease in people taking sleeping tablets for more than 3 months.
- ◆ Death - people taking sleeping tablets have a significantly increased risk of death compared to people who do not take these medicines.

### What is the alternative to sleeping tablets?

Your doctor, nurse or pharmacist can give you advice on how to tackle poor sleep without taking medication. Advice includes reducing your intake of caffeine, more exercise and suggestions to improve your bedtime routine.



### Advice if a sleeping tablet is prescribed

Sleeping tablet prescriptions will usually only last a short period (a week or so). Please **do not** ask for more, or for it to be added to your repeat prescription.

- ◆ If you feel drowsy the next day, do not drive or operate machinery.
- ◆ Avoid alcohol.
- ◆ Never give your sleeping tablets to anyone and always keep them in a safe place such as a locked cupboard.

### Sleeping tablets and driving

All sleeping tablets make you sleepy. When this happens do not drive or use tools or machinery.

A significant number of drivers (25%) involved in road traffic accidents have impaired driving skills because of alcohol, drugs or illness. If the police believe your driving is impaired due to taking sleeping tablets they can do a blood test and you could be charged with driving under the influence of drugs even if this medicine is prescribed.

For more information see this website:

<https://www.gov.uk/drug-driving-law>

## Sleeping tablets and pain killers

Use of sleeping tablets and opioid pain killers such as codeine, tramadol and morphine increases the risk of drowsiness, difficulties in breathing (respiratory depression), coma and may be life-threatening. If you are taking this combination it could be helpful to inform friends or relatives to be aware of these signs and symptoms. If you experience these symptoms you should seek medical attention immediately. If you are prescribed this combination you should make an appointment to discuss this with your doctor.



Some pain killers which you can buy from Pharmacies include codeine and you should avoid using these medicines if you are taking sleeping tablets.

## What if you have been taking sleeping tablets regularly for some time?

- ◆ As a rule, you should consider reducing or stopping them **with** advice from your doctor
- ◆ Do it gradually; cut down the dose a little at a time.
- ◆ Pick a good time to do it; it is best to wait until any life crises have passed and your stress levels are as low as possible. Consider stopping the tablets whilst on holiday, or when you have less pressure from work, etc.
- ◆ You are likely to have worse sleep initially when reducing your tablets, however, most people who reduce or stop sleeping tablets say they feel much better mentally and physically.
- ◆ Look for possible causes of your sleep problems such as pain, indigestion, breathlessness or itching. These may interfere with your sleep and can often be treated without sleeping tablets. Check with your doctor or pharmacist whether any other medicines you are taking can cause sleeping problems.
- ◆ Use the 'Good sleep guide'; copies are available from your GP practice.

Developing a good sleep pattern may take a few weeks. Remember you should be confident that you will achieve it by working through the guidance you have been given.

**Speak to your Doctor, Pharmacist or Nurse if you need more help.**

**IMPORTANT: Do not stop your sleeping tablets suddenly if you have been taking them for longer than 4 weeks as this can cause problems. Make an appointment with your doctor to discuss how to stop your sleeping tablets safely.**

*Adapted from All Wales Medicines Strategy Group: Hypnotic and Anxiolytic reduction or withdrawal resources by Wigan Borough CCG, with permission and thanks.*