

Questions about

SLEEPING PILLS

and the answers that may
SURPRISE YOU

A booklet for people who may benefit
from reducing or stopping their sleeping pill



You may find this booklet helpful if you regularly take a sleeping pill.

Some common sleeping pills are:

Generic Name	Brand Name	Generic Name	Brand Name
zopiclone	IMOVANE®	clonazepam	RIVOTRIL®
zolpidem	SUBLINOX®	doxepin	SILENOR®
eszopiclone	LUNESTA®	diphenhydramine	SLEEP-EZE®
temazepam	RESTORIL®	trazodone	DESYREL®
lorazepam	ATIVAN®	There are other medications used to help with sleep – too many to list here (e.g. amitriptyline, quetiapine).	

When someone has difficulty sleeping for several months, it is called **CHRONIC INSOMNIA**. Sometimes people take a sleeping pill for many months or years because of chronic insomnia.

I need my sleeping pill in order to get any rest. That is why I have been taking it for years.



I DON'T HAVE ANY SIDE EFFECTS, SO WHY WOULD I STOP?

I HAVE TRIED TO CUT BACK OR GO WITHOUT IT, BUT EVERY TIME I DO MY SLEEP GETS WORSE.



I have always been a terrible sleeper and taking a pill is the only thing that works.

Can you tell which of these are **FACTS**, and which are **MYTHS**?

1. Good sleepers always fall asleep right away.
2. Sleeping pills are the best way to treat chronic insomnia.
3. If I quit taking sleeping pills, my sleep will be worse tonight.
4. If a sleeping pill doesn't work, nothing will.

1. Good sleepers always fall asleep right away.

This is a myth.

Keep expectations realistic when it comes to your sleep.

Even a good sleeper might:

- take up to 30 minutes to fall asleep
- wake up once or twice in the night
- sleep poorly every now and then

It may also surprise you to learn another myth: not everyone needs 8 hours of sleep a night. **The right amount of sleep for you is the amount that allows you to feel rested.** For some people, this might only be 6 hours a night, especially as they get older.

2. Sleeping pills are the best way to treat chronic insomnia.

It was once thought that this was true, but we know now that **it is a myth.**

When you took your sleeping pill last night – did it work as well as the first time you took it?

Sleeping pills tend to lose their effect over time. Chances are, your body has gotten used to your sleeping pill. This is normal and expected. When people take a sleeping pill regularly, their brain starts having a hard time falling asleep on its own. The brain relies on the sleeping pill to do all the work, and this results in a lower quality of sleep. Page 8 has more details about this.

Natural sleep actually feels more refreshing than sleep from a pill. Luckily, there is a way to restart your brain's urge to sleep. Learn more on page 10.

3. If I quit taking sleeping pills, my sleep will be worse tonight.

This is a fact.

If you take a sleeping pill every night, it is important not to stop taking it suddenly. Stopping abruptly can make you feel restless, wide awake, and unable to sleep.

Talk to your healthcare provider. They can help you make a plan to reduce your dose slowly. At the same time, there are other ways to improve sleep besides taking a sleeping pill – see #4 below.

It is important to remember ... **while your sleep might get worse at first, in the long run it will be better without the pill!** Linda was shocked at how much better she sleeps now that she no longer uses a sleeping pill. Her story is on page 6.

4. If a sleeping pill doesn't work, nothing will.

This is a myth.

Sleeping pills are intended to be used for a short period of time. It might surprise you to learn that most are recommended for no longer than 10 days.

This is because in the long term, **sleeping pills don't work as well as non-drug approaches.**

Non-drug options can take some effort, especially at first. However, people who embrace them find that in the long run, they sleep deeper and longer, and wake up more refreshed. Ideas to help your brain relax without a sleeping pill are found on page 10.

Linda's Story: I'm Finally

For many years I had trouble with sleep. I hadn't slept through the night since before we had kids, and our youngest is 33.

Maybe over the last three years is when my family doctor prescribed me zopiclone. At first, I would just periodically take it. My doctor told me to take a half a pill, so I would do that every once in a while. But it seemed like as time went on things were getting more stressful in our lives. And then **I found myself taking a pill almost every night just to get to sleep.** I would take a pill, I would be tired when I'd go to bed, I would fall asleep – and then I'd wake up maybe 2 hours later. And then I might lie awake for an hour, or two hours, and my brain would get going and going.

I thought the zopiclone helped. I could feel myself getting tired. I was looking forward to taking it because I knew it would put me to sleep even with everything on my mind; I knew I could count on at least a couple, maybe three, hours of sleep a night. But then it seemed like that was all I would get. **It put me to sleep; it didn't keep me asleep.**

I tried other sleeping pills, like melatonin, but the zopiclone seemed to work the best. But I didn't want to be taking it anymore. I wanted to be like other people. **I wanted to be able to just go to bed and go to sleep without needing a pill.** I didn't want to be reliant on it.

My doctor told me, "We have to retrain your brain so that when you go to bed, your brain knows it is time to sleep." **My doctor put me on a plan, and said it was going to get worse before it got better.** She looked at my sleep diary, and she said it showed I should go to bed at midnight, and get up at 5:30. At the same time, she stopped the zopiclone. Oh, it was tough. I was going on only 4 hours of sleep a night for probably the first 3 weeks of the program. I had no energy.

But it was short term pain, for a long term gain.

Now I sleep for about six hours straight. There are some days when I wake up to the alarm – which never used to happen. **I wake up refreshed** and say, "Wow, it felt like I slept." It's so different.

I would never have thought it would go this well. **I am shocked at how much better it is on the other side.** I haven't taken a sleeping pill for a long time ... and I'm finally getting a good sleep.

Getting a Good Sleep

LINDA'S SLEEP TIPS

My doctor used a technique called sleep restriction to retrain my brain. You can ask your healthcare provider to help you make a plan, or visit mysleepwell.ca/cbti.

I was a clock watcher. But now I'm not because my doctor told me cover up the clock. Now that I can't look, I can see why looking isn't so good. It just turns your brain on for no reason. You get stressed thinking about how many hours of sleep you have left.

I used to go to bed at 9:00pm, turn the TV on, and watch TV in bed until 11. My doctor told me that I was using my bed as a resting spot, not a sleeping spot. She told me I could help retrain my brain by using my bed only for sleeping.

Support is important. My husband was really good with me going to bed at a different time than him while I was retraining my brain.

My doctor told me, "You can't go to bed when you're exhausted, you have to go to bed when you are sleepy." I found that confusing, but I've figured it out now. I can be physically exhausted, and I try going to bed, but I just lie there awake. But when my brain is sleepy – that means it's time to go to bed. I have a set bedtime, but my doctor said that if my brain is truly sleepy a little before my bedtime, I can try going to bed then. And she was right.

It's a lot of work, to retrain your brain. You've got to stick to it. It's going to get worse before it gets better. But it does get better.

Could my sleeping pill be tricking me?

Sometimes sleeping pills seem to work even though they are not really helping any more.

The first time you take the sleeping pill, it does help.

On average, sleeping pills help people fall asleep around 20 minutes sooner than normal. For many, this feels like a relief, and so they start taking sleeping pills every night.



The body becomes dependent to the sleeping pill.

Dependence to a sleeping pill usually happens when it is taken every night for a few weeks. The body gets used to having it there, and stops trying to fall asleep on its own. You may now need a **higher dose** to get the **same effect** as before.



When the dose is missed, you cannot fall asleep.

This is called **rebound insomnia**. Your body has come to expect your sleeping pill. It has forgotten how to fall asleep on its own. You will feel wide awake or restless after missing a dose.

Only by stopping the sleeping pill can the body relearn how to sleep on its own.

Stopping the sleeping pill lets the brain remember how to make the hormones that make us feel sleepy. But it needs to be retrained on how to do this – turn to page 10 for more information.

What will stopping my sleeping pill feel like?

Some people are on a low enough dose of their sleeping pill that it can be stopped right away. However, for most people it is best to **slowly lower the dose** of a sleeping pill. This usually means **less rebound insomnia**, which feels more comfortable. There are many ways to do this. One way it might look is:

Weeks 1 & 2
3/4 of the dose every night



Weeks 3 & 4
1/2 of the dose every night



Weeks 5 & 6
1/4 of the dose every night



Your healthcare provider can help make a plan with you.

Despite the dose being lowered slowly, rebound insomnia can still occur. For example, you may still feel restless, anxious, and have trouble sleeping. This can last for weeks, but it is temporary.

Stopping your sleeping pill is just one part of getting your sleep on track. **Turn the page to learn how to retrain your brain.**

Retraining the Brain for Sleep

For a good sleeper, **getting into bed is the signal to fall asleep**. People with insomnia can retrain their brains to make the same connection. Here are a few things you can do:

1. HELP YOUR BRAIN RELAX.

Before bed, avoid caffeine, nicotine & alcohol; turn off electronics; have a routine to relax you; consider progressive relaxation.



2. GET UP AT THE SAME TIME EVERY DAY.

A consistent wake-up time gives your brain predictability.



3. FIND YOUR SLEEP WINDOW SO YOU ARE GOING TO BED AT THE RIGHT TIME.

A sleep diary can help you learn about your sleep patterns & find the best time to go to bed. You might ask a trained health care provider for help to set this up.

One diary is available here: tinyurl.com/rx-sleep-diary.

DATE	Background information: How stressful was today? (0=no stress; 5= lots of stress) What exercise did you do today? Did you nap today? If yes, when and for how long? Did you take sleep medication? If so, what?				Time into bed	Time lights were turned out	Minutes to fall asleep	Number of awakenings	When did the longest awakening occur, and how long did it last?	Time of final awakening	Time got out of bed	Total Sleep
	Stress level	Exercise	Nap	Sleep meds								
Monday	3	20 min walk at 2 pm	no nap	zopiclone 5mg at 10 pm	10:45 pm	11:00 pm	60 min	4	3:00 am, 45 minutes	8:00 am	8:30 am	7 hours

4. LEAVE YOUR BED IF YOU ARE NOT SLEEPING.

If you are awake in your bed for more than about 20 minutes, get up and do something relaxing & unproductive. Go back to bed when feeling sleepy.



This is just a small introduction to retraining the brain. If this approach appeals to you, please:

talk to your healthcare provider or visit mysleepwell.ca/cbti, or keltyskey.com/courses/insomnia

Is stopping my sleeping pill really worth it?

Stopping a sleeping pill is usually not easy. Your sleep will likely be poor for weeks until your body has reset itself. So, is it worth it?

SOME BENEFITS OF A PILL-FREE SLEEP:

less grogginess in the morning



LESS CHANCE OF FALLING AND BREAKING A BONE IF I AM AN OLDER ADULT



less money spent on sleeping pills



in the long run, A MORE RESTFUL SLEEP at night

Linda's story is on page 6. She couldn't believe how much better she now sleeps without a pill. It took a lot of work, but now **her sleep is deeper and more refreshing**.

Are you using sleeping pills?



*Do you take a sleeping pill most nights?
Are you still having trouble sleeping?
Are you worried you might be getting side effects?*

LOOK INSIDE FOR

- facts and myths about sleeping pills
- a true testimonial from someone who got off their sleeping pill
- non-drug sleeping tips
- and more...

If you read this booklet and have questions, talk to your health care provider. Pharmacists who provide specialized sleep counselling in Saskatchewan can be found at tinyurl.com/sk-cbti.

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