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Recommended reading: At a glance: Sleep and insomnia

Getting enough sleep is important for our health and wellbeing. It is not possible to say how much sleep is normal because that depends on individual factors and people's age. It is common for children above the age of five to sleep for eight or nine hours a night. Adults sleep about seven hours a night. People sleep less as they get older: over 80-year-olds sleep around six hours a night. But the... [more](#)

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AHFS Consumer Medication Information [Internet]. Bethesda (MD): American Society of Health-System Pharmacists; 2000-2011.

Zolpidem (zole pi' dem)

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Why is this medication prescribed?

Zolpidem is used to treat insomnia (difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep). Zolpidem belongs to a class of medications called sedative-hypnotics. It works by slowing activity in the brain to allow sleep.

How should this medicine be used?

Zolpidem comes as a tablet and an extended-release (long-acting) tablet to take by mouth. Zolpidem also comes as a sublingual tablet to place under the tongue and an oral spray which is sprayed into the mouth over the tongue. This medication is usually taken as needed, no more than one time a day, immediately before bedtime. Zolpidem will work faster if it is not taken with a meal or immediately after a meal. Follow the directions on your prescription label carefully, and ask your doctor or pharmacist to explain any part you do not understand. Use zolpidem exactly as directed.

You will probably become very sleepy soon after you take zolpidem and will remain sleepy for some time after you take the medication. Plan to go to bed right after you take zolpidem and to stay in bed for 7 to 8 hours. Do not take zolpidem if you will be unable to remain asleep for 7 to 8 hours after taking the medication. If you get up too soon after taking zolpidem, you may experience memory problems.

Swallow the extended release tablets whole; do not split, chew, or crush them. Tell your doctor or pharmacist if you cannot swallow tablets.

The sublingual tablet can be removed from the blister pack by peeling off the top layer of paper and pushing the tablet through the foil. Place the tablet under the tongue, and wait for it to dissolve. Do not swallow the tablet or take the tablet with water.

To use the oral spray, follow these directions and those that appear in the package label:

1. Before using zolpidem spray for the first time, or if you have not used the spray bottle for 14 days, you must prime the pump.
2. Line up the arrows on the cap and the base of the container. Squeeze the cap at the arrows and pull the cap and base apart to separate. Remove the clear protective cap from the pump.
3. To prime the pump, hold the container upright. Point the black spray opening away from your face and other people. Press down on the pump with your forefinger, release and let it return to the starting position and repeat 4 more times. You should see a fine spray come out of the container.
4. To use zolpidem spray, hold the container upright with the black spray opening pointed directly into your mouth, over the top of your tongue. Press down fully on the pump to make sure that a full dose of zolpidem is sprayed.
5. Let the pump return to the starting position. If your doctor prescribed only one spray of zolpidem, put

the clear protective cap back over the pump at the top of the base after each use. If your doctor has prescribed two sprays of zolpidem for your dose, a second spray should be used.

6. Snap the child-resistant cap back onto the base and rotate the cap and base so that the arrows are not lined up. This is to help prevent a child from using the spray mist bottle.

Your sleep problems should improve within 7 to 10 days after you start taking zolpidem. Call your doctor if your sleep problems do not improve during this time or if they get worse at any time during your treatment.

Zolpidem should normally be taken for short periods of time. If you take zolpidem for 2 weeks or longer, zolpidem may not help you sleep as well as it did when you first began to take the medication. If you take zolpidem for a long time, you also may develop dependence ('addiction,' a need to continue taking the medication) on zolpidem. Talk to your doctor about the risks of taking zolpidem for 2 weeks or longer. Do not take a larger dose of zolpidem, take it more often, or take it for a longer time than prescribed by your doctor.

Do not stop taking zolpidem without talking to your doctor, especially if you have taken it for longer than 2 weeks. If you suddenly stop taking zolpidem, you may develop unpleasant feelings or mood changes or you may experience other withdrawal symptoms such as shakiness, lightheadedness, stomach and muscle cramps, nausea, vomiting, sweating, flushing, tiredness, uncontrollable crying, nervousness, panic attack, difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep, uncontrollable shaking of a part of your body, and rarely, seizures.

You may have more difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep on the first night after you stop taking zolpidem than you did before you started taking the medication. This is normal and usually gets better without treatment after one or two nights.

Your doctor or pharmacist will give you the manufacturer's patient information sheet (Medication Guide) when you begin treatment with zolpidem and each time you refill your prescription. Read the information carefully and ask your doctor or pharmacist if you have any questions. You can also visit the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) website (<http://www.fda.gov/downloads/Drugs/DrugSafety/ucm089833.pdf>) or the manufacturer's website to obtain the Medication Guide.

Other uses for this medicine

This medication may be prescribed for other uses; ask your doctor or pharmacist for more information.

What special precautions should I follow?

Before taking zolpidem,

- tell your doctor and pharmacist if you are allergic to zolpidem, any other medications, or any of the ingredients in the zolpidem product you are using. Ask your pharmacist or check the Medication Guide for a list of the ingredients.
- tell your doctor and pharmacist what other prescription and nonprescription medications, vitamins, nutritional supplements, and herbal products you are taking or plan to take. Be sure to mention any of the following: antidepressants ('mood elevators') including imipramine (Tofranil) and sertraline (Zoloft); chlorpromazine (Thorazine); itraconazole (Sporanox); ketoconazole (Nizoral); medications for anxiety, colds or allergies, mental illness, pain, or seizures; rifampin (Rifadin, Rimactane); sedatives; sleeping pills; and tranquilizers. Your doctor may need to change the doses of your medications or monitor you carefully for side effects.
- tell your doctor if you drink or have ever drunk large amounts of alcohol, use or have ever used street drugs, or have overused prescription medications. Also tell your doctor if you have or have ever had depression; mental illness; thoughts of harming or killing yourself or trying to do so; a problem with heavy snoring; sleep apnea (condition in which breathing briefly stops many times during the night); other breathing problems such as asthma, bronchitis, and emphysema; myasthenia gravis (condition that causes weakness of certain muscles); or kidney or liver disease.
- tell your doctor if you are pregnant or plan to become pregnant. If you become pregnant while taking zolpidem, call your doctor. Do not breast-feed while you are taking zolpidem.
- if you are having surgery, including dental surgery, tell the doctor or dentist that you are taking zolpidem.
- you should know that zolpidem may cause drowsiness (especially in elderly people) the next day after taking your dose, and may increase the risk that you will fall. Take extra care not to fall and do not

drive a car or operate machinery until you know how this medication affects you.

- do not drink alcohol during your treatment with zolpidem. Alcohol can make the side effects of zolpidem worse.
- you should know that some people who took zolpidem got out of bed and drove their cars, prepared and ate food, had sex, made phone calls, were sleep-walking, or were involved in other activities while not fully awake. After they woke up, these people were usually unable to remember what they had done. Call your doctor right away if you find out that you have been driving or doing anything else unusual while you were sleeping.
- you should know that your behavior and mental health may change in unexpected ways while you are taking this medication. It is hard to tell if these changes are caused by zolpidem or if they are caused by physical or mental illnesses that you may already have or suddenly develop. Tell your doctor right away if you experience any of the following symptoms: aggressiveness, strange or unusually outgoing behavior, hallucinations (seeing things or hearing voices that do not exist), feeling as if you are outside of your body, memory problems, difficulty concentrating, anxiety, becoming easily agitated, slowed speech or movements, new or worsening depression, thinking about killing yourself or trying to do so, confusion, and any other changes in your usual thoughts, mood, or behavior. Be sure that your family knows which symptoms may be serious so that they can call the doctor if you are unable to seek treatment on your own.

What special dietary instructions should I follow?

Unless your doctor tells you otherwise, continue your normal diet.

What should I do if I forget a dose?

Zolpidem should only be taken at bedtime. If you did not take zolpidem at bedtime and you are unable to fall asleep, you may take zolpidem if you will be able to remain in bed for 7-8 hours after taking the medication. Do not take zolpidem if you are not ready to go to sleep right away and stay asleep for at least 7-8 hours.

What side effects can this medication cause?

Zolpidem may cause side effects. Tell your doctor if any of these symptoms are severe or do not go away:

drowsiness

tiredness

headache

dizziness

lightheadedness

'drugged feeling'

unsteady walking

difficulty keeping balance

constipation

diarrhea

gas

heartburn

stomach pain or tenderness

changes in appetite

uncontrollable shaking of a part of the body

pain, burning, numbness, or tingling in the hands, arms, feet, or legs

unusual dreams

redness, burning, or tingling of the tongue (with sublingual tablets)

- dry mouth or throat
- ringing, pain, or itching in the ears
- eye redness
- muscle aches or cramps
- joint, back, or neck pain
- heavy menstrual bleeding

Some side effects can be serious. If you experience any of the following symptoms, or those listed in the SPECIAL PRECAUTIONS section, call your doctor immediately:

- rash
- hives
- itching
- swelling of the eyes, face, lips, tongue, or throat
- feeling that the throat is closing
- difficulty breathing or swallowing
- hoarseness
- shortness of breath
- nausea
- vomiting
- pounding heartbeat
- chest pain
- blurred vision or other vision problems

Zolpidem may cause other side effects. Call your doctor if you have any unusual problems while you are taking this medication.

If you experience a serious side effect, you or your doctor may send a report to the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) MedWatch Adverse Event Reporting program online [at <http://www.fda.gov/Safety/MedWatch>] or by phone [1-800-332-1088].

What storage conditions are needed for this medicine?

Keep this medication in the container it came in, tightly closed, and out of reach of children. Store it at room temperature, away from excess heat, light and moisture (not in the bathroom). Do not freeze zolpidem oral spray. Store the zolpidem oral spray bottle upright. Throw away any medication that is outdated or no longer needed. Talk to your pharmacist about the proper disposal of your medication.

In case of emergency/overdose

In case of overdose, call your local poison control center at 1-800-222-1222. If the victim has collapsed or is not breathing, call local emergency services at 911.

Symptoms of overdose may include:

- drowsiness
- coma (loss of consciousness for a period of time)
- slowed breathing or heartbeat

What other information should I know?

Keep all appointments with your doctor.

Do not let anyone else take your medication. Zolpidem is a controlled substance. Prescriptions may be refilled only a limited number of times; ask your pharmacist if you have any questions.

It is important for you to keep a written list of all of the prescription and nonprescription (over-the-counter) medicines you are taking, as well as any products such as vitamins, minerals, or other dietary supplements. You should bring this list with you each time you visit a doctor or if you are admitted to a hospital. It is also important information to carry with you in case of emergencies.



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The following brand names are from RxNorm, a standardized nomenclature for clinical drugs produced by the National Library of Medicine:

Brand names

- Ambien
- Edluar
- Intermezzo
- Zolpimist