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PSYCHIATRY

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PATIENT EDUCATION

Zolpidem

Ambien / Ambien CR / Sublingual and spray formulations

A guide for adults taking zolpidem.
Follow the directions on your prescription and your provider's recommendations.

CHECK YOUR EXACT FORMULATION

NO EXTRA DOSES OUTSIDE YOUR PLAN

Formulations: Immediate-release, extended-release, sublingual, and spray formulations are not interchangeable. Starting doses differ by sex, age, liver function, and formulation.

What it is used for

Zolpidem treats insomnia. Standard formulations help with sleep onset; extended-release treatment also helps sleep maintenance. Certain low-dose sublingual formulations have separate middle-of-the-night instructions.

How it works

It enhances GABA activity at a benzodiazepine-receptor site. It can help sleep while impairing memory, coordination, and alertness, including the next day.

What to expect over time

Sleep may improve from the first few nights. Review persistent insomnia rather than increasing doses yourself. Keep a brief record of bedtime, awakenings, wake time, and next-day alertness.

Taking your medication

- For standard bedtime formulations, take only when ready for bed with seven to eight hours available for sleep.
- Only a specifically prescribed low-dose middle-of-the-night formulation uses the separate four-hour remaining-sleep rule. Do not apply that rule to Ambien or Ambien CR.
- Swallow ER tablets whole and follow exact sublingual or spray instructions. Food can delay onset.
- Do not take a second dose that night, combine formulations, or use alcohol.

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Side effects and safety

Possible side effects

- Sleepiness, headache, or dizziness
- Vivid dreams or nightmares
- Next-day impairment or falls

Keeping track of treatment

Some side effects resolve with time; others may require a change of medication. Discuss persistent or bothersome side effects with your provider.

Watch for next-day impairment, memory gaps, falls, and unusual nighttime behavior. Serious complex sleep behaviors can occur even with a first dose and without alcohol.

Tolerance, dependence, and misuse are possible. After regular use, consult with your provider before stopping; rebound insomnia and withdrawal may occur.

After extended-release zolpidem, labeling cautions against driving or activities requiring full alertness the following day. Follow the specific formulation's restrictions.

If you take too much

For a suspected overdose, call Poison Control at **1-800-222-1222** immediately, even if you feel well. Call 911 for a seizure, collapse, trouble breathing, or inability to wake.

Before you start

Do not use if you have had complex sleep behaviors with zolpidem, zaleplon, or eszopiclone. Discuss breathing problems, sleep apnea, liver disease, falls, depression, and substance use.

Discuss pregnancy, pregnancy plans, and breastfeeding with your provider. Treatment decisions should consider both the medication and the condition being treated.

Medicines and interactions

Review all your medications with your provider, including over-the-counter medicines and supplements. Have new medications checked before taking them.

Avoid alcohol and do not combine with another insomnia medicine unless your provider has specifically reviewed the plan. Opioids and other sedatives increase impairment.

Some antibiotics, antifungals, antivirals, and seizure medicines change drug levels. Review grapefruit and all new medicines.

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Living with your treatment

When to get help

Emergency symptoms. Call 911 for slow breathing, inability to wake, or a severe allergic reaction.

Prompt medical advice. Stop the medication and contact your provider immediately after sleepwalking, sleep-driving, or other activities while not fully awake. Report worsening depression or disturbing sleep-related experiences.

If you feel unsafe or have thoughts of self-harm, call 911 or go to an emergency department.

Your questions answered

What if I do something in my sleep?
Stop taking the medicine and contact your provider immediately. Do not restart it after a complex sleep behavior such as sleep-driving.

Can I stop after regular use?
Consult with your provider about a stopping plan. Sleep may briefly worsen, and some people need a gradual reduction. CBT-I can help with ongoing insomnia.

Everyday tips

Keep a consistent wake-up time and allow adequate sleep.

Avoid driving or dangerous work when drowsy, even if you think you slept enough.

Storage and safety

Keep medication in its labeled container, away from excess heat and moisture and out of reach of children and pets. Do not share it. Ask a pharmacy about disposal of unused medication.

Sources

Official prescribing information: zolpidem
Official prescribing information: zolpidem

Educational handout; does not replace your prescription or provider's recommendations.