



Choosing Wisely[®]

An initiative of the ABIM Foundation



AGS Geriatrics
Healthcare
Professionals

Leading Change. Improving Care for Older Adults.

Sleeping pills can have risks for older adults

Try safer and better treatments first

Nearly 1 in 3 older people in the U.S. take sleeping pills. But these pills have risks for older adults. Plus, they may not work so well.

The good news is that there are safer and better treatments for sleep problems. Before you pop a pill, give these a chance.

Bad side effects

Sleeping pills can have harmful side effects in older adults. This is true even for non-prescription drugs and new “Z” drugs. Sleeping pills may affect you more than younger adults. Plus, they may stay in your body longer.

Sleeping pills may cause confusion and memory problems. These problems can make you more likely to have a car crash. And they may make you twice as likely to fall or break your hip.

Other side effects

Some over-the-counter drugs can have other serious side effects, too. These include Benadryl Allergy, Advil PM, Tylenol PM, and Unisom. They may make it hard to go to the bathroom. They may cause dry mouth. Plus, they may make you feel drowsy the next day.

Sleeping pills may not help much

Many ads for sleeping pills promise a full, restful night of sleep. But studies show this is not always true. On average, people who take sleeping pills sleep only a little longer and better than those who don't.

Get a checkup

Before you resort to sleeping pills, get a full medical exam. Your sleep problems may be caused by a health problem. For instance, you may have depression, anxiety, pain, or restless leg syndrome.

When to try sleeping pills

Ask your doctor or nurse about trying sleeping pills if sleep problems are affecting your life and if nothing else has helped. But make sure they check in with you frequently to make sure the drug helps—and doesn't harm—you.

Learn more:

www.choosingwisely.org/patient-resources

This report is for you to use when talking with your healthcare provider. It is not a substitute for medical advice and treatment.
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