



Our Recommendations

Insomnia is a common problem. About 10% to 15% of adults have persistent problems falling or staying asleep. And a third report at least one episode of insomnia per year. A variety of sleeping pills are available, including several newer drugs that have been heavily promoted to doctors and consumers in recent years.

To help you and your doctor choose the sleeping pill that is right for you – if you need one – *Consumers Reports* has evaluated the drugs in this category based on their effectiveness, safety, and cost. This 2-page brief is a summary of an 18-page comprehensive report you can access on the Internet at ConsumerReportsHealth.org/BestBuyDrugs. You can also learn about other categories of drugs we've analyzed on this *free* Web site. Our independent evaluations are based on scientific reviews conducted by the Oregon Health and Science University-based Drug Effectiveness Review Project. *Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs* is partially funded by a grant from the Attorney General Consumer and Prescriber Education Grant Program.

DO YOU NEED A SLEEPING PILL?

Sleeping pills can be helpful if you have short-term insomnia for a few nights. They reduce the time it takes you to get to sleep, and they help you stay asleep. But sleeping pills are not a long-term solution for people who suffer frequent bouts of insomnia or who have trouble sleeping most nights. Such people should see a physician, preferably a sleep specialist, and be treated with behavioral techniques.

Four newer drugs used to treat insomnia – zolpidem (Ambien and Ambien CR), eszopiclone (Lunesta), ramelteon (Rozerem), and zaleplon (Sonata) – are effective. But these medicines are not necessarily better than older, less expensive drugs for many people who need a sleep aid for a night or two. For example, non-prescription drugs containing anti-histamines (Benadryl, Nytol, Tylenol PM, and Sominex) and older prescription sedatives called benzodiazepines may work just as well. Among the benzodiazepines approved as sleep aids are estazolam (ProSom), flurazepam (Dalmane), and temazepam (Restoril).

However, we recommend that both the older and newer sleeping pills be taken more judiciously and less often than appears to be the current pattern of use by millions of people in the U.S. There are two main reasons for that advice:

- People with only mild insomnia may be relying too heavily on pills and not trying to address their sleep problems with non-drug measures.
- Insomnia medicines have side effects, can cause dependency, and even worsen your sleeping problems when abused or misused. The possible side effects include daytime sleepiness, cognitive impairment, dizziness, and rebound insomnia. Sleep-walking, memory lapses, and hallucinations have also been reported.

People with chronic insomnia – three or more nights a week for months on end – do need treatment. We advise behavioral therapy that improves sleep habits, possibly combined with occasional use of sleeping pills.

For the average person seeking short-term help we suggest trying an over-the-counter sleep aid first. If that doesn't work, our comparison of the newer drugs led us to choose zolpidem as a *Best Buy*. This is the less expensive generic version of the drug Ambien.

This information was last updated in July 2008.

Effectiveness and Differences – The Newer Sedative Drugs

| Drug and Year it Went on Market | Helps You Fall Asleep? | Average Time to Fall Asleep ¹ | Helps You Stay Asleep? | Percent With Next-Day Drowsiness ¹ | Risk of Rebound Insomnia? ² | Risk of Dependency |
|---------------------------------|------------------------|--|---|---|--|--------------------|
| Zolpidem (Ambien) (1992) | Yes | 33 to 46 minutes | Yes | 2%-3% | Yes | Yes |
| Ambien CR (2005) | Yes | NA | Yes | 15% | Yes | Yes |
| Lunesta (2004) | Yes | 50 minutes | Yes | 8% to 10% | Yes | Yes |
| Rozerem (2005) | Yes | 75 minutes | No information | 5% | No | No |
| Sonata (1999) | Yes | 36 to 55 minutes | Evidence weaker than for zolpidem and Lunesta | 5%-6% | No | Yes |

1. As assessed in one major study or, if range given, several studies. Figures are not meant to imply that drugs were necessarily compared to each other in a study with consistent design.
 2. Rebound insomnia occurs when you stop taking a sleeping pill and the insomnia gets worse. The risk of rebound insomnia is generally small, though some people are vulnerable. When experienced, it usually goes away in a few days.

Costs of Selected Insomnia Drugs¹

| Generic Name ² | Brand Name | Is a Generic Drug? | Average Cost for 7 Doses ³ | Average Cost for 15 Doses ³ |
|---|------------|--------------------|---------------------------------------|--|
| Newer Sedatives | | | | |
| Zolpidem 5mg | Generic | Yes | \$16 | \$35 ⁴ |
| Zolpidem 10mg | Generic | Yes | \$15 | \$33 ⁴ |
| Zolpidem 5mg | Ambien | No | \$41 | \$88 |
| Zolpidem 10mg | Ambien | No | \$40 | \$86 |
| Zolpidem 6.25mg sustained release | Ambien CR | No | \$37 | \$78 |
| Zolpidem 12.5mg sustained release | Ambien CR | No | \$36 | \$77 |
| Eszopiclone 1mg | Lunesta | No | \$45 | \$96 |
| Eszopiclone 2mg | Lunesta | No | \$44 | \$93 |
| Ramelteon 8mg | Rozerem | No | \$34 | \$72 |
| Zaleplon 5mg | Sonata | No | \$36 | \$78 |
| Zaleplon 10mg | Sonata | No | \$35 | \$76 |
| Selected Antidepressant | | | | |
| Trazodone 50mg | Desyrel | No | \$15 | \$32 |
| Trazodone 100mg | Desyrel | No | \$30 | \$63 |
| Trazodone 50mg | Generic | Yes | \$3 | \$5 |
| Trazodone 100mg | Generic | Yes | \$3 | \$5 |
| Selected Benzodiazepines⁵ | | | | |
| Estazolam 2mg | ProSom | No | \$15 | \$32 |
| Estazolam 2mg | Generic | Yes | \$7 | \$15 |
| Flurazepam 15mg | Dalmane | No | \$13 | \$29 |
| Flurazepam 15mg | Generic | Yes | \$3 | \$6 |
| Lorazepam 1mg | Ativan | No | \$17 | \$35 |
| Lorazepam 2mg | Ativan | No | \$25 | \$53 |
| Lorazepam 1mg | Generic | Yes | \$4 | \$8 |
| Lorazepam 2mg | Generic | Yes | \$5 | \$10 |
| Quazepam 15mg | Doral | No | \$34 | \$73 |
| Temazepam 15mg | Restoril | No | \$55 | \$117 |
| Temazepam 30mg | Restoril | No | \$57 | \$123 |
| Temazepam 15mg | Generic | Yes | \$3 | \$6 |
| Temazepam 30mg | Generic | Yes | \$4 | \$8 |
| Triazolam 0.25mg | Halcion | No | \$15 | \$33 |
| Triazolam 0.25mg | Generic | Yes | \$4 | \$10 |

UNDERSTANDING GENERICS: A generic drug is one that is sold under its generic name. For example in this table, zolpidem is the generic name and Ambien is the brand name. Generics are less expensive. If you are prescribed a brand-name drug that is available as a generic, ask your doctor or pharmacist if switching would be appropriate.

1. Not all doses are listed due to space limitations. For a comprehensive list, see our full 18-page report for free at ConsumerReportsHealth.org/BestBuyDrugs.
2. All the medicines listed are tablets or capsules. Recommended use is typically one pill at bedtime.
3. Prices reflect nationwide retail average for January 2008, rounded to the nearest dollar. Prices are derived by *Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs* from data provided by Wolters Kluwer Health, Pharmaceutical Audit Suite®. Wolters Kuwer is not involved in our analysis or recommendations.
4. A spot check of online pharmacies indicates varying prices for generic zolpidem, with some sites offering it for \$15 to \$18 for 30 pills.
5. Those approved by the FDA for treating insomnia. Selected doses only.

Note: This brief was made possible in part by a grant from the Attorney General Consumer and Prescriber Education Grant Program, which is funded by the multi-state settlement of consumer fraud claims regarding the marketing of the prescription drug Neurontin.

