



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.

Our Recommendations

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 antihistamines (Benadryl, Nyquil, 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				
Estazolam2mg	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 Kluwer 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.

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