

Many insomniacs turn to valerian and melatonin to help them sleep

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A study published in the July 1st issue of the journal SLEEP finds that large segments of the U.S. population use valerian or melatonin to treat their insomnia.

The study, authored by Donald L. Bliwise, PhD, of Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, focused on the data collected from 31,044 individuals from the 2002 Alternative Health/Complementary and Alternative Medicine Supplement to the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS).

Dr. Bliwise discovered that, of the survey sample, 5.9 percent used valerian and 5.2 percent used melatonin. Relatively greater use occurred in individuals under the age of 60. The decision to use such substances was made in consultation with a health care provider less than half of the time.

“Within the United States, usage of alternative and complementary medicine is rising dramatically,” said Bliwise. “Within the limitations on the NHIS methodology, the usage of valerian and the usage of melatonin appear to be relatively high. Specific data on valerian usage and on melatonin usage in general populations, however, are relatively scarce.”

However, an evaluation of common oral non-prescription treatments for insomnia conducted by the American Academy of Sleep Medicine’s (AASM) clinical practice review committee did not find a beneficial effect for many of the herbal supplements, dietary changes and other nutritional supplements popularly used for treating insomnia symptoms,

including valerian and melatonin. The AASM does not support the use of such products for treating symptoms of insomnia. The evaluation was published in the April 15th, 2005, issue of the Journal of Clinical Sleep Medicine.

The AASM's position statement on treating insomnia with herbal supplements can be viewed online at

<http://www.aasmnet.org/Articles.aspx?id=254>.

Behavioral therapies and medications have been shown to be effective therapies for insomnia. Behavioral therapies use non-pharmacologic methods to improve sleep, and are effective and long-lasting. Sleep medications are effective and safe treatments for insomnia when used properly and judiciously by a patient who is under the supervision of a sleep medicine or primary care physician. A physician should always be consulted before any medications are taken.

Insomnia is a classification of sleep disorders in which a person has trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, or waking up too early. These disorders may also be defined by an overall poor quality of sleep.

Insomnia is the most commonly reported sleep disorder. About 30 percent of adults have symptoms of insomnia. Less than 10 percent of adults are likely to have chronic insomnia. Insomnia is more common among elderly people and women.

While a brief case of insomnia can arise due to temporary stress, excitement or other emotion, more than 20 million Americans report having a chronic form of insomnia that keeps them from sleeping well nearly every night.

As a result, insomnia can lead to severe daytime fatigue, poor performance at school and work, physical symptoms such as headaches

and, in some cases, depression.

Those who think they might have insomnia, or another sleep disorder, are urged to discuss their problem with their primary care physician, who will issue a referral to a sleep specialist.

Source: American Academy of Sleep Medicine

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