

Ambien, Lunesta, Sonata: What are the 'Z meds' for sleep?

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Ambien, Lunesta, Sonata: Millions of bleary-eyed Americans turn to this class of so-called "Z-drugs" to [get restful sleep](#).

But how do these drugs work, and do they come with risks?

Experts at the U.S. Food and Drug Administration have issued an [advisory](#) to boost awareness about the meds.

All of these medications—generically known as zolpidem (Ambien, Ambien CR, Edluar, and Zolpimist), eszopiclone (Lunesta), and zaleplon

(Sonata)—work by putting the brakes on [brain activity](#), allowing you to drift off to sleep.

But the FDA warns that Z drugs also come with risks, most notably upping your odds for "complex sleep behaviors"—things like sleepwalking, sleep driving, sleep cooking or even taking other medicines.

"The FDA has received reports of people taking these insomnia medicines and accidentally overdosing, falling, being burned, shooting themselves and wandering outside in extremely cold weather, among other incidents," the agency noted.

You might not even recall any of these behaviors occurring once you reawaken, according to the FDA.

The onset of complex sleep behaviors tied to Z drug use is also unpredictable. For some, the behavior can begin after the first dose, while for others it might begin much later into use.

Many sleep medicines can also cause daytime drowsiness, so avoid driving and other hazardous tasks under those circumstances.

Some other tips for safe use of Z drugs:

- Always discuss the risks and benefits of these medicines with your doctor, and read the Patient Medication Guide before you start taking the drug
- Always take the medicine at the recommended dose, and don't use a Z drug in combination with other sleep medications (including OTC meds)
- If you discover that you've been engaging in any complex sleep behavior, stop taking the drug immediately and contact your

doctor

- Don't drink alcohol while using a Z drug because this will make side effects more likely

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