

Melatonin

What is Melatonin?

- The Dracula of hormones! It only comes out when it's dark. It's an endogenous hormone, meaning that your body makes it naturally, released by the pineal gland (a tiny gland in your brain).
- As the sun sets and it gets cooler and darker, your body releases melatonin to help your body get ready to fall asleep and stay asleep.

Supplemental Melatonin

- It is still a hormone and it is naturally contained in some foods (tomatoes, walnuts, olives, rice, barley, strawberries, cherries, and cow's milk).
- Because it is in some foods, the supplement is NOT regulated by the FDA. This means that melatonin is made in factories that aren't monitored.
- Doses may not be controlled or accurate, meaning that what's on the package isn't necessarily what's in the pill.
- Most over the counter products are dosed too highly and will cause melatonin blood levels to rise much higher than what the body naturally produces. Taking a typical dose (1 to 3 mg) could raise your blood melatonin levels to 1 to 20 times normal.
- Too high of dose can cause headaches, nausea, dizziness and irritability.
- There is no one size fits all dose. The amount and timing depends on the sleep problem.

How does the supplement work and how should it be used?

- Compared to placebo, there's no research evidence that melatonin is an effective sleep aid. In other words, it doesn't make you sleepy! It is more complex than that. One might compare melatonin to the act of noticing that it's bedtime- you still have to be tired in order to go to sleep.
- What it's really good at is resetting your body's clock, or circadian rhythm. So it's great for night owls who want to get to sleep earlier, shift workers or folks who are jet-lagged.
- Always talk with your PMHNP about everything you take, even non-prescribed substances, as they may be affecting your sleep. If you aren't seeing a PMHNP yet, ask your therapist for a consult.
- Melatonin should be used as a short-term intervention and in low doses. For exact dosing, please see your PMHNP.
- To increase its effectiveness, pay attention to lights and temperature. Artificial lights and warm room temperature keep your body from releasing melatonin. This is why it is important to begin dimming the lights about 2 hours before your planned bedtime. It is also helpful to keep a cool bedroom. A hot shower before bed will cause your body to release melatonin as it rapidly cools down.