



# Zolpidem

(Pronounced zol-pee-dem)

## Why has zolpidem been prescribed?

Zolpidem is known as a hypnotic drug or 'sleeping tablet'. These medications are prescribed to treat insomnia.

## What are the benefits of taking zolpidem?

Hypnotics may be helpful for people who have difficulty getting to sleep, who sleep only for short periods or who awaken very early or many times during the night.

## Are there any precautions with zolpidem?

Zolpidem is suitable for most people. As with all medicines, however, there are precautions. Your prescriber will usually check that it is safe to prescribe zolpidem, but let your prescriber know if any of the following apply to you, as extra care may be needed:

- a) If you have myasthenia gravis, sleep apnoea syndrome, severe lung disease, respiratory failure or suffer from severe liver trouble.
- b) If you are taking any other medication, particularly sedative antihistamines, antibiotics such as rifampicin, medication for schizophrenia or depression, medication for anxiety or insomnia, anticonvulsants, muscle relaxants or strong pain killers. Also, tell your prescriber if you buy any medicine 'over the counter' from a pharmacy or supermarket. Please also tell your prescriber if you take any alternative or complementary medicine such as Chinese herbal medicines. St John's Wort should not be taken by patients prescribed zolpidem.
- c) If you are pregnant, breast feeding, or wish to become pregnant.
- d) If you have an intolerance to lactose as this is an ingredient in the tablets.

## What is the usual dose of zolpidem?

The usual adult dose is 10mg at night. This may be lower in older people.

## How should zolpidem be taken?

Zolpidem is usually taken once a day, at night. However, you and your prescriber may decide that it is better for you to take the medicine at another time, for example if you work nights. It is recommended that taking zolpidem should be limited to two to four weeks.

## What form does zolpidem come in?

Zolpidem is available only as tablets. The tablets are available as 5mg and 10mg.

## What should be done if a dose is missed?

Ideally zolpidem should not be taken regularly. It is recommended that it should only be taken every second or third night or when absolutely necessary.

## What will happen when zolpidem is first taken?

Zolpidem should start to work quite quickly, usually within 30 minutes. Many people do not experience any side effects. However some people may experience some side effects. We have listed potential side effects in the table below, whether or not they are likely to be short or long-term and what measures can be taken is also described. There are other possible side effects – we have listed only the most important ones. Ask your doctor, pharmacist or nurse if you are worried about anything else that you think might be a side effect. Further information on side effects is available in the official manufacturer's leaflet.

## Reporting side effects

The 'Yellow Card' scheme encourages patients to report any side effects that they feel may be caused by their medication. Ask your doctor, pharmacist, or nurse for the forms if you wish to report any side effects. Alternatively, telephone 0800 100 3352 or go to [www.mhra.gov.uk](http://www.mhra.gov.uk).

## Is zolpidem addictive?

Zolpidem is not addictive, but if hypnotics are taken for extended periods or at high doses there may be risk that tolerance may develop. Tolerance means that higher doses are needed to achieve the same effect. If you stop taking the medicine suddenly, you may experience unpleasant physical feelings. Symptoms usually only occur after extended use and can include return of insomnia, anxiety, sweating, headache, palpitations and panic attacks. Reducing the dose of zolpidem slowly may make these symptoms less severe.

## What about alcohol?

It is recommended that people taking zolpidem should not drink alcohol. This is because both hypnotics and alcohol can cause drowsiness. If the two are taken together, severe drowsiness can result. This can lead to falls and accidents. As well as this, drinking alcohol may make sleep problems worse. Never drink alcohol and drive. Discuss any concerns you have with your doctor, pharmacist or nurse.

## Is it OK to stop taking zolpidem when symptoms go away?

Yes. Zolpidem should be taken only for short periods - ideally for less than two weeks. Other methods of dealing with insomnia should also be tried. You should always discuss with your prescriber any plans you have to reduce or stop any of your prescribed medicines.

## Are there any alternatives to zolpidem?

Yes, there are alternatives available. Although hypnotics have broadly similar therapeutic effects they differ in the side effects they produce. There are other treatments for insomnia available so most people can find one which suits them. Psychological and practical therapies such as sleep hygiene can also help in some people with insomnia, either as an alternative to medication or alongside it.

## Summary of side effects

Other (less common) side effects	How common is it and what can be done about it?
Headache	<b>Uncommon</b> This should wear off within a few days. Paracetamol can be taken but discuss with your prescriber if this persists.
Dizziness	<b>Uncommon</b> This may wear off within a few days. Discuss with your prescriber if this persists.
Drowsiness (the morning after)	<b>Uncommon</b> Tell your prescriber if you feel drowsy the morning after taking zolpidem. Do not drive if you are drowsy or dizzy the next day.
Nausea (with or without vomiting)	<b>Uncommon</b> This should wear off within a few days. Taking the medication with food may help. Discuss with your prescriber if this persists.

Double vision	<b>Uncommon</b> This usually occurs at the beginning of treatment, discuss with your prescriber if this persists.
Confusion	<b>Rare</b> Tell your prescriber if taking zolpidem causes any changes in mood, perception, or thinking ability.
Irritability	<b>Rare</b> Tell your prescriber if taking zolpidem causes any changes in mood, perception, or thinking ability.
Aggression	<b>Rare</b> Tell your prescriber if taking zolpidem causes any changes in mood, perception, or thinking ability.
Confusion	<b>Rare</b> Tell your prescriber if taking zolpidem causes any changes in mood, perception, or thinking ability.
Depressed mood	<b>Rare</b> Tell your prescriber if taking zolpidem causes any changes in mood, perception, or thinking ability.
Amnesia (memory loss)	<b>Rare</b> Tell your prescriber if taking zolpidem causes any changes in mood, perception, or thinking ability.
Nightmares	<b>Rare</b> Tell your prescriber if taking zolpidem causes any changes in mood, perception, or thinking ability.
Hallucination	<b>Rare</b> Tell your prescriber if taking zolpidem causes any changes in mood, perception, or thinking ability.
Sleep walking or any other activity while asleep	<b>Very rare</b> This maybe increased if drinking alcohol or taking higher doses. Tell your prescriber straightaway if you or someone else is aware of any odd behaviour while sleeping. Zolpidem will need to be discontinued.
Rash	<b>Very rare</b> Tell the prescriber straightaway if any rash develops.
Incoordination	<b>Very rare</b> Tell your prescriber if you experience difficulty coordinating movements.

Very common = almost everyone affected  
Common = many people affected  
Uncommon = some people affected

Rare = few people affected  
Very rare = very few or no one affected

## Disclaimer

This leaflet does not replace the official manufacturer's Patient Information Leaflet.

For more information, visit [www.slam.nhs.uk/meds](http://www.slam.nhs.uk/meds) or speak to a health care professional.

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