

Treating Insomnia: The Newer Sleeping Pills

What is insomnia?

Insomnia means that you have a hard time falling asleep, staying asleep, or both.

Short-term insomnia can last up to 14 days, but it often goes away after a few nights. Stress and jet lag are common causes. Long-term, chronic insomnia can interfere with your life. If you have trouble sleeping three or more nights a week for a month or longer, talk to your doctor. There may be a medical cause for your insomnia.

How is insomnia treated?

If insomnia is a problem, these treatments may help:

- Avoiding alcohol or caffeine.
- Learning good sleep habits.
- Taking an over-the-counter sleep aid, such as diphenhydramine (in Benadryl, Nytol, Sominex, and Unisom). Do not use for more than a few nights in a row.
- Taking a benzodiazepine, a kind of prescription drug. These drugs are usually effective, but side effects include sleepiness the next day. There is also a risk of addiction. And they can make insomnia worse.

There is also a newer group of prescription sleeping pills. This report tells you about them.

The newer sleeping pills include:

- eszopiclone (Lunesta)
- ramelteon (Rozerem)
- zaleplon (Sonata and generic)
- zolpidem (Ambien and generic) also available as an:
 - extended release tablet (Ambien CR and generic)
 - dissolvable tablet (Edluar)
 - oral spray (Zolpimist)

How effective are the newer pills?

All of the newer sleeping pills help people fall asleep faster. Zolpidem appears to help people fall asleep faster than the others, and may result in better quality sleep.

It is not clear how well these pills help you stay asleep. Some people sleep longer. Others still wake up at night.

What are the side effects?

All sleeping pills can cause side effects. Using alcohol increases the risk of side effects. Side effects include:

- Dependence and abuse
- Insomnia again when you stop the pills
- Sleepiness the next day, headaches, and dizziness
- Rare side effects: sleep-walking, sleep-driving, sleep-eating, loss of memory, and hallucinations

Our advice:

If you need help sleeping for just a night or two: Try over-the-counter sleep aids, such as diphenhydramine (in Benadryl, Nytol, Sominex, and Unisom). They usually work as well as the newer sleeping pills, and they cost much less.

If you have chronic insomnia: Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) may be a better choice than pills. A therapist works with you to change your sleep routines. Ask your health insurance if it covers CBT.

If you and your doctor decide that you need a sleeping pill, we chose this as a *Consumer Reports Best Buy Drug*:

 **Generic zolpidem tablets**—they have the same active ingredient as Ambien but cost less. Details are on the chart on the next page.

To reduce side effects, we recommend:

- Use the lowest dose possible. Older adults should start with half the regular dose to help prevent falls.
- Use them briefly—not more than seven nights in a row.

Compare the Newer Sleeping Pills

Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs are in blue. We recommend these drugs because they are at least as effective and safe as the other drugs listed, and they cost less.

Generic Name & Strength	Brand Name	Average Time to Fall Asleep	Average Cost for: Seven days ¹ /15 days ¹
Zolpidem 10 mg tablet	Ambien	33–46 minutes	\$53/\$115
Zolpidem 5 mg tablet	Ambien	33–46 minutes	\$54/\$118
CR BEST BUY Zolpidem 10 mg tablet	Generic	33–46 minutes	\$12/\$27
CR BEST BUY Zolpidem 5 mg tablet	Generic	33–46 minutes	\$14/\$31
Zolpidem 6.25 mg sustained-release tablet	Ambien CR	33–46 minutes	\$56/\$122
Zolpidem 12.5 mg sustained-release tablet	Ambien CR	33–46 minutes	\$56/\$121
Zolpidem 6.25 mg sustained-release tablet	Generic	33–46 minutes	\$41/\$89
Zolpidem 12.5 mg sustained-release tablet	Generic	33–46 minutes	\$40/\$87
Zolpidem 5 mg dissolvable tablet	Edluar	20 minutes	\$47/\$102
Zolpidem 10 mg dissolvable tablet	Edluar	20 minutes	\$53/\$116
Eszopiclone 1 mg tablet	Lunesta	50 minutes	\$56/\$121
Eszopiclone 2 mg tablet	Lunesta	50 minutes	\$57/\$123
Eszopiclone 3 mg tablet	Lunesta	50 minutes	\$58/\$125
Ramelteon 8 mg tablet	Rozerem	75 minutes	\$47/\$103
Zaleplon 10 mg capsule	Sonata	36–55 minutes	\$38/\$83
Zaleplon 5 mg capsule	Generic	36–55 minutes	\$18/\$39
Zaleplon 10 mg capsule	Generic	36–55 minutes	\$17/\$36

¹Recommended use is one pill at bedtime.

Prices are based on nationwide retail average prices for October 2011. *Consumer Reports Best Buy Drugs* obtained prices from data provided by Wolters Kluwer Pharma Solutions, which is not involved in our analysis or recommendations.

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