

Zolpidem (pron. zol-pea-dem)

What is zolpidem used for?

Zolpidem (also known as Stilnoct[®]) is mainly used to help treat insomnia i.e. problems getting to sleep. It is one of a number of medicines called "hypnotics" and is sometimes called a "Z hypnotic" for obvious reasons. It is available as tablets.

What is the usual dose of zolpidem?

The usual dose of zolpidem is around 5-10mg at night.

How should I take zolpidem?

Swallow the tablets with at least half a glass of water whilst sitting or standing. This is to make sure that the tablet does not stick in your throat and reaches the stomach quickly.

When should I take zolpidem?

Take your zolpidem at bedtime. There is no problem about taking zolpidem with or after food. Some people find it useful to take a dose if they wake in the night and can't get back to sleep. You shouldn't do this more than 2-4 hours before you would normally get up.

What are the alternatives to zolpidem?

There are many other medicines (e.g. benzodiazepines), talking therapies and treatments for insomnia, and the causes of insomnia. See our "Handy charts" to help you compare the medicines, how they work and their side effects.

How long will zolpidem take to work?

Zolpidem usually starts to work in about 15 minutes. The effect wears off in about 2-4 hours or so.

How long will I need to keep taking zolpidem for?

Please look one of the "Handy charts" for more help and advice on how long you might need to take it for. It is not a good idea to take it every night as the effect may start to wear off.

Is zolpidem addictive?

Zolpidem is not addictive as such.

Can I stop taking zolpidem suddenly?

Some people get something called "rebound insomnia" when they stop a hypnotic. This means they find it even more difficult to get to sleep than before. It is best to take zolpidem only when you need it but if you have taken it every night for more than a few weeks, it might be best to reduce the dose slowly over a few days. You could discuss this fully with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

What should I do if I forget to take a dose of zolpidem?

This is not really a problem.

Can I drink alcohol while I am taking zolpidem?

If you drink alcohol while taking zolpidem it may make you feel more sleepy. This is particularly important if you need to drive or operate machinery and you must seek advice on this.

Will zolpidem affect my other medication?

Zolpidem has only a few interactions with other medicines.

- Zolpidem can cause sleepiness (a bit obvious, as that's the reason people take it!) and so you should be careful if taking it with alcohol or another medicine that also causes sleepiness e.g. benzodiazepines (e.g. diazepam, lorazepam, temazepam), some antidepressants etc
- The effects of zolpidem can be decreased by smoking or rifampicin (for TB)
- You should have no problems with "The Contraceptive Pill" and zolpidem

Not all of these interactions happen in everyone. Some of these medicines can still be used together but you will need to follow your doctor's instructions carefully. There are many other possible drug interactions.

What sort of side-effects might occur if I am taking zolpidem?

The table below will show you some of the main side effects you might get from zolpidem. These are a few side effects from taking higher doses of zolpidem, but if you just take it at night then you will probably get very few side effects.

Side effect	What happens	What to do about it
LESS COMMON (<i>less than about 1 in 10 people might get these</i>)		
Hallucinations	You see or hear things that are not there.	Tell your doctor. It may be possible to lower your dose or change your hypnotic
Nightmares	Unpleasant dreams	This probably means your dose is too high. Talk to your doctor about this.
Somnolence	You feel sleepy or sluggish. It can last for a few hours after taking your dose, or longer.	Don't drive or use machinery. It probably means you should have a lower dose or try a different hypnotic.
Diarrhoea	Going to the toilet more than usual and passing loose, watery stools.	Drink plenty of water. Get advice from your pharmacist. If it lasts for more than a day or two, contact your doctor.
Fatigue	You feel tired all the time.	If you feel like this for more than a week after starting zolpidem, tell your doctor. It may be possible to adjust your dose.
UNCOMMON (<i>less than about 1 in 100 people might get these</i>)		
Confusion	Your mind is all mixed up	Tell your doctor. It may be possible to alter your dose or try something else.
OTHER		
Rebound insomnia	More difficult to get to sleep if you stop taking zolpidem.	If you feel like this for more than a week after stopping zolpidem, tell your doctor.

Do not be worried by this list of side effects. Some people get no side effects at all and others may get some effects that are not listed in this table. If you think you might have a side effect to your medicine, you should ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist. If you want to know more, go to our website for links to other websites with more information.

Will I need a blood test if I am taking zolpidem?

You should not need any blood tests while you are taking zolpidem.

Can I drive or cycle while I am taking zolpidem?

You may feel a bit sleepy the next morning when taking zolpidem. You should be careful as it may slow down reaction times. Until this wears off, or you know how zolpidem affects you, do not drive or operate machinery.

The small print: This leaflet is to help you understand about your medicine. You should also read the manufacturer's Patient Information Leaflet (PIL). You may find lots more on the internet but beware as internet-based information is not always accurate. Do not share medicines with anyone else. Go to our website for fuller answers to these and many other questions e.g. driving, women's health, how it works, doses and interactions, and about the conditions. The "Handy charts" will help you compare the main medicines for each condition, how they work and their side effects.