



OVER-THE-COUNTER MEDICINES, SUPPLEMENTS, AND YOUR SLEEP

A Simple Guide for Better Rest

Many people turn to over-the-counter medicines or supplements when sleep isn't coming easily. Some of these can help, while others may quietly get in the way of a good night's rest. Most were not designed as "sleep aids," but they can still affect how quickly you fall asleep, how deeply you rest, and how refreshed you feel in the morning.

This guide highlights what may help, what to be cautious about, and how to make smart choices.



PAIN AND FEVER RELIEF

ACETAMINOPHEN (TYLENOL, PARACETAMOL)

- Helps reduce pain or fever so your body can relax.
- Doesn't directly make you sleepy, but may make sleep easier when pain or fever is what is keeping you awake.
- Commonly used for pain or fever during pregnancy and in children when taken exactly as directed. Check with a healthcare provider before use in pregnancy, for young children, or if using other medicines that may also contain acetaminophen/paracetamol.



NSAIDS (IBUPROFEN, NAPROXEN, ASPIRIN)

- Reduce pain, swelling, and fever.
- Can be helpful if pain wakes you up, such as with cramps or migraines.
- Nightly or long-term use may interfere with deep sleep.

May cause stomach upset, worsen reflux, increase bleeding risk, or strain the kidneys in some people, especially with frequent use or certain health conditions.

Tip: Acetaminophen is usually gentler for sleep. Save NSAIDs for when pain is the main problem.

SUPPLEMENTS FOR SLEEP SUPPORT



MELATONIN

- Helps regulate your body clock.
- Timing depends on the reason for use. It is often taken 30–60 minutes before bedtime for short-term sleep-onset support, or earlier when used for circadian timing, with clinician guidance.
- May be helpful for circadian rhythm problems, jet lag, or some sleep difficulties linked with ADHD, autism, or menopause-related changes, but children and teens should use it only with medical guidance.
- Higher doses (above 3 mg) may cause grogginess or restless sleep.



VITAMIN D AND VITAMIN B6

- **Vitamin D:** Low levels are linked to insomnia and low mood.
- **Vitamin B6:** Helps your body make melatonin. Doses above 100 mg daily over time may cause nerve-related side effects.



MAGNESIUM

- Calms muscles and the nervous system.
- May help if you have restless legs or PMS/PMDD-related sleep trouble.
- Forms such as citrate or glycinate are best absorbed.



IRON

- Low iron is strongly linked to restless legs and broken sleep.
- When iron is low, restoring iron levels may improve restless legs and sleep, including in children and during pregnancy.
- Should only be taken under medical supervision since too much iron can be harmful.

GENTLE HERBAL OPTIONS

Herbal options may help some people, but they can still cause side effects or interact with medicines. Use extra caution if pregnant or breastfeeding, taking sedatives, blood thinners, psychiatric medicines, or preparing for surgery.



VALERIAN ROOT

May help some people fall asleep faster, though results vary. It can sometimes cause morning grogginess.



CHAMOMILE

Often used as a calming bedtime tea. Use caution with allergies to ragweed or related plants, and use clinician guidance before concentrated extracts, especially during pregnancy or breastfeeding.



LEMON BALM

Promotes relaxation and may help with sleep linked to stress or menopause.

OTHER HELPFUL SUPPLEMENTS



L-THEANINE

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- Found in green tea.
- Encourages relaxed alertness and eases anxiety.
- May improve sleep quality for some people, especially when used with magnesium or melatonin.



GLYCINE

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- May support sleep quality and next-day alertness for some people.
- It is usually taken before bedtime, but dose and timing should be discussed with a healthcare provider, especially if pregnant, breastfeeding, managing kidney or liver disease, or taking regular medicines.
- Evidence is promising but still growing.

THINGS THAT MAY DISTURB SLEEP



DECONGESTANTS (SUCH AS THOSE FOUND IN COLD AND FLU MEDICINES):

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Can make you restless and keep you awake.



VITAMIN B12 (IF TAKEN AT NIGHT)

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Can act like a mild energy booster.



MULTIVITAMINS WITH B-COMPLEX OR GINSENG:

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May make it harder to relax before bed.



CAFFEINE-CONTAINING PAIN RELIEVERS

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May block deep sleep and cause frequent waking.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER



- Use acetaminophen if pain keeps you from sleeping.
- Save NSAIDs for occasional pain flare-ups, not nightly use.
- Try melatonin if your body clock is off or you are adjusting to a new schedule.
- Magnesium or chamomile may help some people wind down. Valerian should be used with clinician guidance, especially if taking sedatives, psychiatric medicines, blood thinners, or preparing for surgery.
- Ask your provider about checking iron and vitamin D if sleep troubles persist.
- Avoid decongestants, caffeine-based pain relievers, or “energizing” vitamins close to bedtime.
- Timing matters. Moving a vitamin or medicine to earlier in the day can sometimes restore better rest.

KEY TAKEAWAY



OTC medicines and supplements can support healthy sleep, but timing, dose, and your individual needs matter. If sleep problems continue, talk to your healthcare provider. Sometimes a small change, such as shifting when you take something, can make a big difference.

This guide is for general information only.

Always follow directions on the label and check with your healthcare provider before starting new medicines or supplements, especially if you are pregnant, breastfeeding, managing ongoing health conditions, or taking other medicines. In the Philippines, check that OTC medicines and supplements are appropriately registered with the Philippine FDA, when applicable, and avoid products making treatment or cure claims.