

Important Notes About Herbal Remedies For Sleep Disorders

Even if studies report positive benefits from herbal remedies, the compounds used in such studies are, in most cases, not what are being marketed to the public. There have been a number of reported cases of serious and even lethal side effects from herbal products. In addition, some so-called natural remedies were found to contain standard prescription medication.

The following warnings are of particular importance for people with insomnia:

- Chinese Herbal Remedies. Studies suggest that up to 30% of herbal patent remedies imported from China having been laced with potent pharmaceuticals such as phenacetin and steroids. And one study reported a significant percentage of such remedies containing toxic metals. For example, the herbal remedy Sleeping Buddha was recalled in 1998 because it actually contains a benzodiazepine, the major ingredient in many prescription sleeping pills, and also appeared to increase the risk for birth defects in pregnant women. Reports of a few cases of acute hepatitis have occurred from Jin Bu Huan, a Chinese herbal remedy sold as treatment for pain and insomnia.

- Valerian root. A number of studies suggest that valerian may be helpful for insomnia. Side effects include vivid dreams. It should be noted that high doses of valerian can cause blurred vision, excitability, and changes in heart rhythm.

- Kava kava. Kava kava has sedative actions and studies have reported that it helps improve stress-induced insomnia. The most common side effect reported is dizziness. It should be noted, however, that kava kava has been associated with liver failure in some cases.

It also interacts dangerously with certain medications; including alprazolam, an anti-anxiety drug. And it increases the potency of certain other drugs, including other sleep medications, alcohol, and antidepressants.

- Tryptophan and 5-L-5-hydroxytryptophan (HTP). Tryptophan is an amino acid used in the formation of the neurotransmitter serotonin, which is known to promote well-being and has been associated with healthy sleep. L-tryptophan was marketed for insomnia and other disorders but was withdrawn from the market after a contaminated batch caused a rare and even fatal disorder called eosinophilia myalgia syndrome.

5-htp, a byproduct of tryptophan, is still available as a supplement. There have been reports that some brands contain a substance called Peak X, which some evidence suggests may be harmful. To date, no serious adverse effects have been reported and reliable brands are available. Evidence that 5-HTP alleviates insomnia is scant. You don't have to use drugs - whether natural or chemical to help you beat insomnia. There are some great behavior therapies that can be implemented to help you get to sleep.