

Ready to start planning your care? Call us at [800-525-2225](tel:800-525-2225) to make an appointment.

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Memorial Sloan Kettering
Cancer Center

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Melatonin is a hormone your body makes to grow and develop. It also controls your cycle of being asleep and awake. Small amounts of melatonin are found in fruits, nuts, olive oil, and wine.

You can also take it as a supplement to help you sleep.

What are the potential uses and benefits?

Melatonin is used to:

- Treat insomnia (trouble sleeping)
- Treat side effects of chemotherapy such as low platelet counts, weakness, and depression
- Keep blood counts from getting low due to radiotherapy
- Treat seasonal affective disorder (SAD)
- Treat migraines
- Treat insomnia in children with autism spectrum disorder

Melatonin also has other uses that haven't been studied by doctors to see if they work.

Talk with your healthcare provider before taking melatonin supplements. They can interact with some medications and affect how they work.

For more information, read the "What else do I need to know?" section below.

What are the side effects?

Side effects of using melatonin may include:

- Headaches
- Drowsiness
- Changes in sleep patterns
- Trouble sleeping
- Bad dreams
- Confusion or altered mental state
- Fast heart rate
- Flushing or getting red in the face
- Itching
- Stomach cramps
- Low body temperature

What else do I need to know?

- Avoid melatonin if you're driving or operating heavy machinery until you're familiar with how it affects you. It can cause drowsiness.
- Talk with your healthcare provider if you have hormone-sensitive cancer like breast or prostate cancer. Melatonin can change the amount of estrogen in your body. This may worsen your condition.
- Talk with your healthcare provider if you're taking nifedipine (Procardia®). Using melatonin at the same time can increase your blood pressure and heart rate.
- Talk to your healthcare provider if you're taking blood thinners such as warfarin (Jantoven® or Coumadin®). Melatonin may increase your risk of bleeding.
- Talk with your pediatrician before giving your child melatonin. Taking too much melatonin can cause serious side effects in children under age 3, including trouble breathing and death.
- Keep your melatonin in a safe place (such as in a locked cabinet) and out of children's reach.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

Melatonin - Last updated on May 30, 2023

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