

Information for parents and carers about using Melatonin for sleep disorders

What is melatonin and why is it important?

Melatonin is a hormone which is produced in the brain and is released by the body during the hours of darkness.

Melatonin helps us to regulate our sleep pattern.

How can melatonin medication help my child?

Childhood sleeping problems are common and can be particularly problematic for children who have neurological problems, such as:

- Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)
- Learning difficulties
- Autism Spectrum Disorders
- Smith - Magenis syndrome; cerebral palsy; Down Syndrome; multisensory sensory dysfunction ; visual impairment
- Chronic fatigue syndrome / myalgic encephalomyelitis with associated sleep difficulties
- Chronic sleep disturbance e.g. in epilepsy

This is probably because children with these conditions can have difficulty recognising the outside world's sleep-wake cycle. A number of studies have found that giving melatonin as a medicine for short periods of time can have beneficial effects regulating a child's sleep pattern.

Before starting your child on melatonin, your clinician will need to obtain the following information:

- Confirmation from Sleep Right that you have attended the recommended treatment programme and the programme has been unsuccessful. You will be expected to continue to engage with Sleep Right during the 3 month trial period which is aimed at gradually withdrawing treatment.
- Sleep Right will liaise with the specialist about continuing treatment beyond the trial period
- Confirmation that at the time of referral, symptoms of sleep disturbance have been present for at least six months and / or sleep disturbance is so severe that the child/ young person/ family are heading for crisis
- PRIOR Approval letter agreed with the CCG

In exceptional circumstances, your clinician may choose to start melatonin before your child has been seen by Sleep Right. However, prior approval is still required before starting treatment with melatonin.

Medication will be prescribed as a three-month trial of melatonin (prescribed as Circadin® m/r 2mg). The aim will be to establish good bedtime routine in these three months with a view to gradually withdrawing treatment. If your child requires treatment for more than 3 months, the clinician may ask your child's GP to prescribe the melatonin using a standardised shared care form.

How do I store melatonin?

- Store the melatonin tablets in a safe place, out of children's reach.
- Keep the melatonin tablets at room temperature, away from bright light or direct sun light.
- Keep the melatonin tablets away from heat. If your child stops taking the melatonin tablets, please return them to your pharmacist.

How do I get my child's melatonin medication?

The clinician who initially prescribes the medication will advise you on how to order/collect your child's repeat melatonin prescriptions.

Please allow at least seven working days before you require the prescription to ensure you do not run out of the medicine.

How much melatonin should I give my child?

Melatonin is normally prescribed as tablets called Circadin MR.

The clinician will work out the amount of melatonin (the dose) that is right for your child.

The clinician will probably recommend that your child has a low dose to start with. They may then increase the dose until your child's sleep problems have improved.

The prescribing clinician will review whether the melatonin is still required after three to six months in conjunction with feedback from Sleep Right and may ask you to stop giving it to your child for short periods of time to check it is still working. These are known as melatonin holidays.

It is important that you follow the instructions about how much melatonin you should give.

When should I give the melatonin?

You should give the melatonin medicine around the same time each day so that this becomes part of your child's daily routine.

Melatonin tablets are normally swallowed whole with a beaker of water half an hour to an hour before your child's bedtime.

How does melatonin work?

The tablets release melatonin slowly throughout the night.

If your child has problems falling asleep the clinician may ask you to crush the tablet; this will make the melatonin work quicker.

How do I crush the tablets?

Tablets can be crushed into a powder using a tablet crusher. These can be bought at your local pharmacy.

You can then add the crushed tablet to foods such as yoghurt and spreads or mixed in cold liquids, such as water.

What if I forget to give melatonin before bedtime?

If you miss giving your child their medicine before bedtime and they are already asleep, wait until the next day and then give your child their normal dose as usual.

If your child is still awake, give them their normal dose.

Has melatonin been approved to treat sleep disorders?

Circadin is **unlicensed** for treating sleep disorders in children; this means that the manufacturer has not specified it can be used to treat sleep disorders in children. It is licenced for use in adults and has been successfully used for many years in children. However, this will have been discussed with you by the clinician who has prescribed the melatonin and you will have made a joint decision that the medication is suitable for your child.

Are there any side effects?

We use medicines to make our children feel better but occasionally they produce side effects.

- Melatonin is generally well tolerated and no significant adverse effects have been reported with pharmacologically regulated melatonin.
- Both increased and reduced seizure frequency has been reported in children with epilepsy.
- The most common adverse reactions are headache, nasopharyngitis, back pain, and arthralgia
- Tachycardia, confusion, dysphoria, increased seizure activity, psychosis, gynaecomastia, decreased luteinizing hormone levels, decreased temperature, autoimmune hepatitis, elevated liver enzymes, pruritus (itching), flushing, rashes and withdrawal effects have all been reported rarely.
- Headaches and vomiting have been reported locally.
- Should be used with caution in children with epilepsy (seizure frequency should be monitored), liver disease, kidney disease, history of cerebrovascular disease, history of other neurological disorders, depression, concurrent use of beta blocking agents.

A headache can be treated with the child's usual pain medication.
Itching can be treated by applying a moisturising cream or anti-itch cream.
You should contact your child's GP if your child seems unwell or you are concerned about any of these side effects.

If you have any questions about your child's prescription, please contact the prescribing clinician.