

Sleeping Pills Encyclopedia Article

Sleeping Pills

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Contents

Sleeping Pills Encyclopedia Article.....	1
Contents.....	2
Sleeping Pills.....	3

Sleeping Pills

The term "sleeping pills" applies to a number of different drugs in pill form that help a person fall asleep and stay asleep. These drugs are also known as **sedative-hypnotics**. Among the wide range of sleeping pills, many require a doctor's prescription, but some can be purchased as over-the-counter drugs at a pharmacy. Over-the-counter preparations generally contain an antihistamine such as the active ingredient in the allergy medication Benadryl.

Prescription sleeping medications are much stronger. They include barbiturates, benzodiazepines, and a number of other compounds. Barbiturates are no longer widely prescribed because of the risk for fatal overdose, especially when these drugs are combined with alcohol or other **depressants**. Benzodiazepines and other sedative-hypnotics can be short-acting or long-acting. In general, doctors prescribe shorter-acting sleeping pills to help a person relax enough to get to sleep. They prescribe longer-acting sleeping pills to help prevent frequent awakenings during the night. Long-term or inappropriate use can cause tolerance and physical dependence.

See Also

Barbiturates; Benzodiazepines; Sedative and Sedative-Hypnotic Drugs.