

# Sleeping Pills Encyclopedia Article

## Sleeping Pills

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# Sleeping Pills

This is a general term applied to a number of different drugs in pill form that help induce sleep, i.e. sedative-hypnotic agents. There is a wide range of such medication and many require a doctor's prescription, but some can be purchased as OVER-THE-COUNTER drugs at a pharmacy. These latter preparations generally contain an antihistamine such as chlorpheniramine maleate, which produces drowsiness.

The prescription medications are much stronger. They include barbiturates, benzodiazepines, and a number of other compounds. However, due to the risk for fatal overdose, especially in combination with alcohol or other CNS depressants, the barbiturates are no longer widely prescribed for this indication. In general, the shorter-acting sleeping pills are used to help one relax enough to get to sleep, while the longer-acting ones are used to help prevent frequent awakenings during the night. Long-term or inappropriate use can cause TOLERANCE AND PHYSICAL DEPENDENCE.

## See Also

Sedative-Hypnotic; Sedatives: Adverse Consequences of Chronic Use)

## Bibliography

HOBBS, W. R., RALL, T. W., & VERDOORN, T. A. (1996) Hypnotics and sedatives; ethanol. In J. G. Hardman et al. (Eds.), *The pharmacological basis of therapeutics*, 9th ed. (pp. 361-396). New York: McGraw-Hill.