

Treatment Options for Insomnia

Canadian doctors recommend treatment for people struggling with sleep due to insomnia.

Sleep Hygiene

Sleep hygiene is another way to say “good sleep habits” that help improve sleep quality, such as reducing light and sound in your bedroom, or practicing a “wind down” activity. It also includes adjusting your lifestyle, like cutting down on caffeine and changing your exercise regimen. Know that sleep hygiene alone will not treat insomnia, so make sure to talk to your doctor about your sleep issues.

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for Insomnia (CBT-I)

CBT-I is a discussion-based approach that can help you identify and address thoughts, feelings, or behaviours that contribute to sleeplessness.

Over-the-Counter (OTC) Products

Antihistamines

Antihistamines block the action of the chemical called histamine, which works in the brain to promote wakefulness. Because of this, antihistamines can cause drowsiness and may help with occasional sleep difficulties. However, they may lead to next-day grogginess or other side effects, and are not meant for long-term use.

Brand name example(s)	Generic name	Who and what it's for
Nytol Sleep-eze ZzzQuil	Diphenhydramine	Used in adults and adolescents for the relief of occasional sleeplessness by people who have difficulty falling asleep. If sleeplessness persists for more than 2 weeks, contact your doctor

Melatonin

Melatonin is a hormone produced naturally in your body to help regulate sleep-wake cycles. While melatonin is widely available as a supplement and is included in many OTC sleep aids, it is not clinically approved for insomnia and is not intended for long-term use. Evidence for its effectiveness in treating insomnia is limited. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist before using melatonin, especially if you have ongoing sleep difficulties or take other medications.

Brand name example(s)	Generic name	Who and what it's for
Melatonin	Melatonin	Can be used in adults to increase total sleep time and to address sleep issues like jet lag or shift work sleep disorder

Valerian

Valerian root is a traditional herbal medicine that contains chemical compounds that may impact the human brain and body. Currently, it is not fully understood which of those compounds affect sleep. Valerian root is not considered a clinically approved treatment for insomnia, and evidence on its effectiveness remains limited.

Brand name example(s)	Generic name	Who and what it's for
Valerian	Valerian	Used in adults as a sleep aid to promote sleep

Prescription Sleep Medicines

Sleep/Wake Stabilizers (Non-Sedative Hypnotics)

Dual orexin receptor antagonists (DORAs)

Orexins are substances that naturally occur in your body and bind to certain receptors in your brain to keep you awake. Dual orexin receptor antagonists, or DORAs, are a newer class of prescription sleep medicines that temporarily block the activity of orexin receptors. By reducing excessive or inappropriately timed wake signals, DORAs help support the body's natural ability to fall asleep and stay asleep.

These sleep/wake stabilizers represent a novel approach to treating insomnia and are different from traditional sedative hypnotic medicines, in that they are non-habit forming and target the wake system directly by suppressing the wake drive to promote a sleep-wake balance.

Brand name example(s)	Generic name	Who and what it's for
Dayvigo	Lemborexant	Adults who have trouble falling asleep and/or staying asleep (insomnia)
Brand name example(s)	Generic name	Who and what it's for
Quviviq	Daridorexant	Adults who have trouble falling asleep and/or staying asleep (insomnia)

Conventional Sedative Hypnotics

Benzodiazepines

Benzodiazepines—often referred to as “benzos”—are Schedule 4 controlled substances. These traditional prescription sleep medicines work by enhancing the effect of a brain chemical called gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA). This slows activity in the nervous system, helping people fall asleep more quickly and wake less often during the night.

Because benzodiazepines can cause tolerance and/or dependence, they are generally prescribed for short-term use and always under a doctor's supervision.

Brand name example(s)	Generic name	Who and what it's for
Flurazepam	Flurazepam	Used to treat adults for short-term insomnia. It should only be used when the effects of insomnia affect your daytime activities
Brand name example(s)	Generic name	Who and what it's for
Mogadon	Nitrazepam	Used to treat adults for short-term insomnia. It should only be used when the effects of insomnia affect your daytime activities. MOGADON does not treat the underlying cause of insomnia

Brand name example(s) Restoril	Generic name Temazepam	Who and what it's for Used to treat adults for short-term insomnia. It should only be used when the effects of insomnia affect your daytime activities
Brand name example(s) Triazolam	Generic name Triazolam	Who and what it's for Used in adults to relieve the symptoms of transient and short-term insomnia. It should be used only in patients for whom their daytime activities are affected by their insomnia

Z-drugs (non-benzodiazepine hypnotics)

Z-drugs are traditional prescription sleep medicines that enhance the effect of a brain chemical called gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA). By calming brain activity, they help people fall asleep and stay asleep.

Because z-drugs can cause tolerance and/or dependence, they are generally prescribed for short-term use and always under a doctor's supervision.

Brand name example(s) Imovane	Generic name Zopiclone	Who and what it's for Used in adults for short-term insomnia. It should only be used when the effects of insomnia affect a person's daytime activities
Brand name example(s) Lunesta	Generic name Eszopiclone	Who and what it's for Used in adults for short-term treatment of insomnia. It should only be used when the effects of insomnia affect a person's daytime activities
Brand name example(s) Sublinox	Generic name Zolpidem	Who and what it's for Used in adults for short-term insomnia. It should only be used when the effects of insomnia affect a person's daytime activities

Conventional Hypnotics

Tricyclic antidepressants

Tricyclic antidepressants, or TCAs, are an older class of prescription medicines originally developed to treat depression.

This traditional medication works by influencing certain brain chemicals that help regulate sleep, allowing the body to relax and fall asleep more easily.

Brand name example(s) Silenor	Generic name Doxepin	Who and what it's for Used to treat adults who have trouble staying asleep
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