

**Local Community Pharmacy** - Your local community pharmacies offer a wide range of services including information and general advice on symptom relief medicines as well as a prescription collection and delivery service.

## Community Paediatrics Service

### Information for parents and carers about using Melatonin for sleep disorders

For impartial and confidential advice or information on the services provided by Bridgewater or to receive this leaflet in an alternative format call our Patient Services team on 0800 587 0562.

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## 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
- Autistic spectrum disorder.

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.

Good sleep can help your child's:

- Physical health
- Mood
- Behaviour
- Development.

## Contact information

If you require further information please contact one of the following Community Paediatric Teams:

### **Halton**

Telephone number: 0151 495 5400

### **St Helens**

Telephone number: 01744 457215

### **Warrington**

Telephone number: 01925 867867

## 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 order my child's melatonin medication?

The paediatrician 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.

When your child is stabilised on a suitable dose, the paediatrician at the clinic may ask your child's GP to prescribe the melatonin medicine.

If your child's GP chooses not to prescribe the medicine, the paediatrician at the clinic will continue to prescribe the medicine to your child.

## How much melatonin should I give my child?

Melatonin is normally prescribed as tablets called Circadin MR.

Your paediatrician will work out the amount of melatonin (the dose) that is right for your child. The dose will be shown on the medicine label.

Your paediatrician 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.

Your paediatrician will review whether the melatonin is still required after three to six months and may ask you to stop giving it to your child for short periods of time to check it is still working. You may be asked to keep a sleep diary.

**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 paediatrician 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, available free at Child Development Centres or they can be bought at your local community pharmacy.

You can then add the crushed tablet to foods such as yoghurt and spreads or mix 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.

## Can anyone else use this medicine?

You must only give this medicine to the child who it has been prescribed for.

You must **never** give this medicine to anyone else, even if their condition appears to be the same, as this could cause harm.

## Has melatonin been approved to treat sleep disorders?

Melatonin 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 paediatrician 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.

Rarely, melatonin can cause problems with your child's heart rate. You should contact your child's GP before giving your child their next dose if they have chest pain or a fast heart rate or reduced body temperature.

An increase in seizures has been reported in some children with epilepsy.

Some children experience headaches, dizziness and irritability. A headache can be treated with the child's usual pain medication.

Itching has also been reported, this 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.