

MedicinesTalk

Information for consumers and consumer groups about using medicines wisely

Winter 2009
No.30

More than
medicines 3

Shed those
extra kilos 4

Quitting is
worth it 6

Quick
quiz 7

Getting a good night's sleep

We have all had times when sleep eludes us, but for some people getting a good night's sleep can be a major problem.

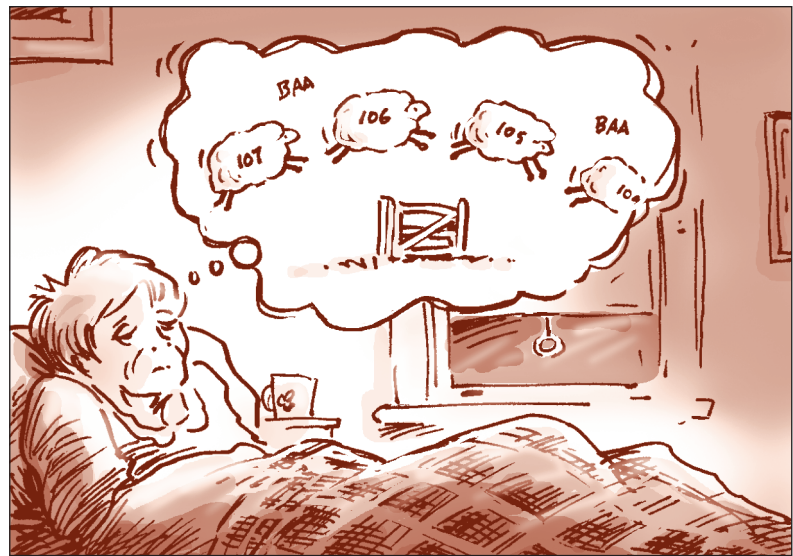
Sleeping less is not necessarily a cause for concern. As we get older, we tend to sleep for fewer hours each night, and to have a lighter and more broken sleep.

Sometimes, sleeping difficulties are due to an underlying problem, such as depression, emotional worries, stress, illness, pain, breathing and snoring problems, restless legs syndrome and some medications. In these cases, dealing with the underlying problem usually solves the sleeping difficulties.

Sleeping tablets

Sleeping tablets are sometimes prescribed for short term or occasional use. However, using sleeping tablets for more than a few days at a time can cause problems, particularly in older people.

When taken for more than 10–14 days, our bodies get used to sleeping tablets, so they don't work as well.



As a result, you need larger and larger doses to get the same sleep effect. Your body can also become dependent on them, making it difficult to sleep without them or to stop using them.

Sleeping tablets may give you a less deep and less relaxed sleep than normal sleep, and you may feel less refreshed the next day.

Sleeping tablets can also have serious side effects, including memory loss, confusion, drowsiness and unsteadiness, that make you more likely to have accidents and falls during the day.

[cont >](#)

If you have been using sleeping tablets for some time, your doctor may advise you to stop using them. However, coming off sleeping tablets is not always easy, as some people experience withdrawal symptoms when they stop taking them. Common withdrawal symptoms include poorer sleep, sweating, feeling ill, dizziness, blurred vision, irritability, poor concentration, feeling anxious, and feeling depressed. The withdrawal symptoms are temporary, and can be minimised by slowly reducing the amount of sleeping tablets you take over a period of 6–8 weeks or more.

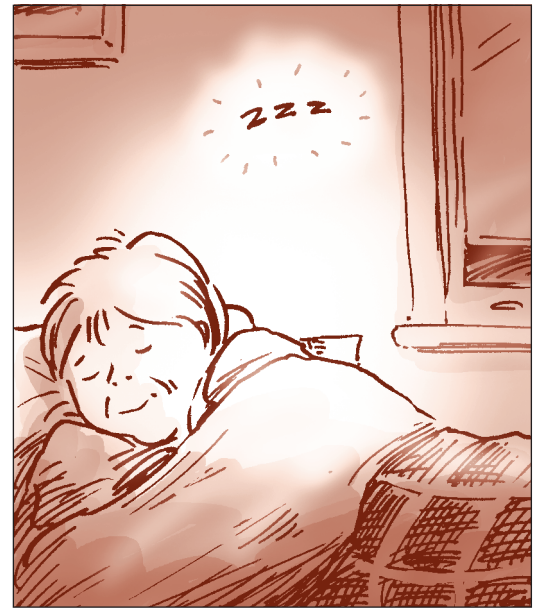
Talk to your doctor about the best way to come off your sleeping tablets, and other ways of tackling your sleep problems.

Using sleeping tablets for more than a few days at a time can cause problems.

Sleeping without tablets

Using non-drug methods to help you get a good night's sleep is much better for your health and well-being than resorting to sleeping tablets. However, working out which methods work for you may take time. Here are a few methods that might help.

- Wake and get up at the same time each morning, even if you've had a bad night's sleep.
- Avoid napping during the day, especially in the afternoon.
- Regular exercise and sunshine help you sleep better, so be active and spend time outside during the day.



- Avoid alcohol and caffeine-containing drinks (tea, coffee, cocoa and cola) in the evening: have a bedtime cup of warm milk or a carbohydrate snack instead.
- Get your body into 'going to sleep' mode by winding down with quiet activities and a regular 'going to bed' routine in the hour or so before bedtime.
- Don't read or watch TV in bed.
- Learn and practice some relaxation techniques, and use them when you can't get to sleep.
- If you can't get to sleep, get up and do something until you feel sleepy. ■

Spread the word

You are most welcome to reproduce articles from *MedicinesTalk* in your community group's newsletter and other publications.

All we ask is that you reproduce the whole article and that you acknowledge *MedicinesTalk* and the National Prescribing Service.

More than medicines

How can you help seniors become more aware of the benefits of lifestyle changes like stopping smoking and losing weight? One way is to provide opportunities for them to learn from each other. This approach has been adopted by the National Prescribing Service (NPS) and COTA, the voice of senior Australians.

For the last four years, NPS and COTA have been training seniors in each state and territory to become Peer Educators. The Peer Educators then go out and talk about medicines to their peers, that is, other seniors in their area. To date, COTA Peer Educators have given free talks about the wise use of medicines and generic medicines to over 3,000 groups.

However, medicines are not always the only or best way to improve our health and well-being, so a new talk has been developed.

The 'More than medicines–living well' talk focuses on the role that lifestyle factors like stopping smoking and losing weight can play in preventing and better controlling chronic conditions. In the case of some chronic conditions such as type 2 diabetes and high blood pressure, these lifestyle changes can complement or even replace treatment with medicines, thus reducing or eliminating the need for medicines.

Many more seniors are now using the internet to search for information about health, medicines and other treatments. The 'More than medicines–living well' talk shows seniors how to critically judge health

information found on the internet, and how to determine whether a particular website has been endorsed as containing accurate information.

The 'More than medicines–living well' talk lasts about an hour, and is free. It can be held at a time and place that suits your group. The speaker can cover the effect of lifestyle factors on health in general, or they can focus on the effects of lifestyle factors on type 2 diabetes, chronic pain or hypertension, depending on your group's needs.

Speakers can come to your group at a time and place that suits you.

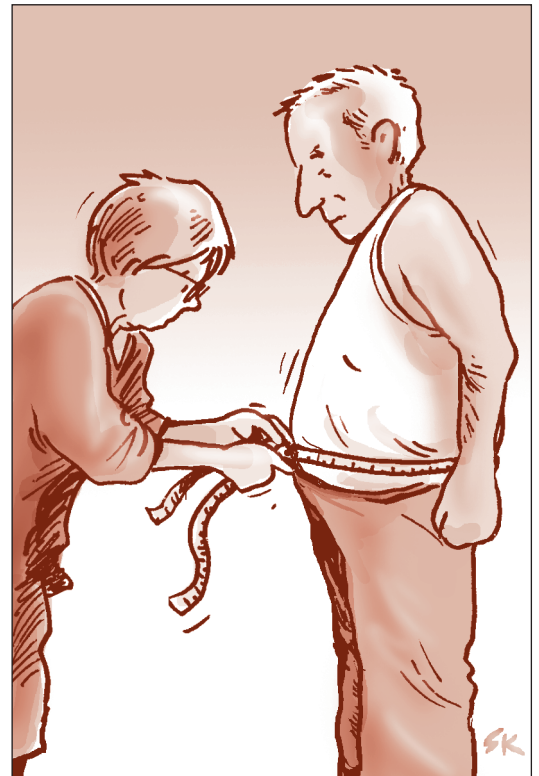
If you would like a COTA Peer Educator to come and give the 'More than medicines–living well' talk to your group, ring COTA in your state or territory to arrange a free session for your group. ■

State	Telephone
ACT	02 6282 3777
New South Wales	02 9286 3868
Northern Territory	08 8941 1004
Queensland	07 3316 2999
South Australia	08 8232 0422
Tasmania	03 6228 1897
Victoria	03 9655 2107
Western Australia	08 9321 2133

Shed those extra kilos, for your health!

Putting on weight doesn't just mean a bigger waist and 'growing' out of your clothes. It also means an increased chance of developing debilitating health problems like type 2 diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, osteoarthritis, gout and some cancers.

A quick and easy way of working out your chances of developing chronic health problems due to being overweight is to measure your waist with a tape measure. A measurement of more than 94 cm for most men and 80 cm for most women indicates that you have an increased chance of developing the chronic health problems mentioned above. Furthermore, the more weight you put on, the more likely you are to develop such problems.



A quick way of working out your chances of developing weight-related problems is to measure your waist.

However, the good news is that losing even a few kilos of excess weight can have benefits by

- decreasing your risk of developing such chronic health problems
- improving your overall health and well-being, so you feel better, have more energy, and can do things more easily
- making it easier to treat any such conditions you may have
- in some cases, avoiding or decreasing your need for medicines to treat any such conditions.

Losing weight

As many of us know, losing weight is much easier said than done. Just as you didn't put on the weight overnight, you won't lose it overnight. It takes time and effort.

Essentially, to lose weight you need to consume fewer calories and be more physically active.

Eat less

To lose weight permanently, you need to change your eating habits. Aim to eat more fruit and vegetables, less fatty foods, less processed foods, and less 'extra' foods like lollies, chocolate, biscuits, cakes and so on. Also, drink plenty of water, and limit soft drinks and alcohol.

Start with small changes, such as drinking a glass of water instead of a soft drink, and eating a piece of

fruit instead of a biscuit or two. Also, make changes that you don't really notice, such as replacing high fat milk with a nice tasting low fat milk, and using less oil and fat in your cooking.

Move more

Being more active means moving around more: it doesn't necessarily mean a vigorous exercise program. Any movement helps! Aim for at least 30 minutes of physical activity each day, either in one burst or in shorter bursts that add up to at least 30 minutes.

Small changes can increase your activity level. For example, park the car a block or two from your destination, so you have to walk a bit further, or walk to the shops instead of driving.

Weight loss products

Because losing weight is hard, it's tempting to look for a magic bullet to make it easier. If you are thinking about using weight loss products, talk to your doctor or pharmacist. Also, be wary about any advertising claims made about such products.

Remember that weight loss medicines only work when used in combination with a lower calorie diet and a more active lifestyle.

Furthermore, like all medicines, weight loss medicines may have side effects and may interact with your other medicines.

Sources of help

Talk to your GP before embarking on a plan to lose weight. You may also

like to seek advice from other health professionals. For example, a dietitian can help you with dietary advice, and a physiotherapist can help you choose suitable exercise activities that take into account any health problems you may have.

Losing weight is easier when you have support from those around you. Consider enlisting the support of friends and relatives to help you stick to your new healthy eating plan and increased activity levels, particularly during the first few weeks. ■

Can you help?

MedicinesTalk is written for consumers by consumers. We want to make sure it's full of useful information that you want to know about, but we need your help. Do you have any topics you would like us to cover in the next 12 months? If so, let us know.

Please send your ideas to *MedicinesTalk*, GPO Box 1995, Hobart 7001 or medicinesstalk@iinet.net.au by 1 August.

Your ideas will be presented at the *MedicinesTalk* annual planning day, along with any others received. About 20 topics will then be chosen for the 2009–10 issues of *MedicinesTalk*.

Don't forget you can have copies of *MedicinesTalk* posted to your home or office free of charge. Order online at www.nps.org.au/consumer_resources or by ringing 02 8217 8700.

Quitting is worth it

We all know that smoking is harmful, but most of us don't realise just how harmful it is. Smoking causes or makes worse many conditions, including heart attacks, strokes, emphysema and lung cancer. Half of all lifetime smokers die from diseases caused by their smoking, and half of them die before the age of 70.

However, the good news is that quitting smoking has immediate and long-term health benefits. Within days, you can breathe and move around more easily. Within one year, your chance of having a heart attack is halved, and within 10 years your chance of dying from lung cancer is halved. It may also reduce your need for medicines.

Quitting

Cigarettes are addictive, so quitting smoking is usually difficult. You really have to want to quit if you are to have any real chance of succeeding. Even so, it often takes several attempts before success is achieved.

It often pays to get support right from the start.

There are many different ways of quitting, and different methods work for different people. Find out about the various methods, and choose what seems best for you. This may involve a combination of two or more methods.

Some people go 'cold turkey'. Others gradually reduce the number of cigarettes they smoke each day, and then quit.



Some people use aids such as medicines, supportive counselling, or complementary and alternative therapies like acupuncture, meditation or hypnosis to help them stop smoking.

Support and information

Because quitting is so difficult, it often pays to get support right from the start.

A doctor, pharmacist, nurse or Quitline (13 7848 or 13 1848) can give you support and information about the various methods of quitting and their pros and cons, help you choose a method, and give you tips and written information about quitting. Quitline can send you a free 'Quit Pack', which contains information about quitting, what to expect, and ways of dealing with the challenges you may face when quitting.

Attending individual or group counselling sessions, enrolling in a quit course, or joining a stop-smoking group can give you opportunities to obtain ongoing encouragement,

support and helpful information from fellow quitters or someone experienced in helping people to quit. This can increase your chances of success by helping you to stay motivated and on track.

Enlisting the support of family and friends can also be vital. They can give you day-to-day encouragement and support, particularly when you are craving a cigarette.

Medicines

Several medicines have been developed to help people quit smoking. Research suggests that using these products can double your chances of quitting successfully.

Nicotine replacement therapy

Nicotine replacement therapy gives you a steady small dose of nicotine from a skin patch, chewing gum, lozenge, micro-tab or inhaler. The small dose of nicotine replaces the nicotine you previously obtained from cigarettes, which reduces the cravings and withdrawal symptoms often experienced when quitting. This makes it easier for you to break your old smoking habits, and learn to live without cigarettes.

Nicotine replacement products are much safer than cigarettes, because they do not contain the cancer-causing substances and other dangerous chemicals found in tobacco smoke. They are also less addictive than cigarettes.

Nicotine replacement therapy is available without a prescription from pharmacies. Brands include Chemist's Own Nicotine, Nicabate CQ, Nicorette,

QuitX and others. Your pharmacist and GP can give advice about which product to use and how to use it.

Prescription medicines

Two prescription medicines are available to help smokers quit: bupropion hydrochloride, which is sold under the brand names Bupropion-RL, Clorprax, Prexatone and Zyban SR; and varenicline, which is sold under the brand name Champix.

Both medicines are available under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, but only in certain circumstances. Talk to your doctor if you think they might help you. ■

Quick quiz

Test your knowledge of the quality use of medicines issues covered in this edition of *MedicinesTalk*.

Are the following statements **true** or **false**? Answers on back page.

1. Sleeping tablets can have side effects such as memory loss and falls.
2. Weight loss products can help you lose weight.
3. Nicotine products, such as patches and gum, are less addictive than cigarettes.
4. Consumer Medicine Information (CMI) leaflets contain information about prescription medicines and are free from pharmacies. ■

Quick quiz answers

1. True. Sleeping tablets can have serious side effects, including memory loss, confusion, drowsiness and unsteadiness, that make you more likely to have accidents and falls during the day.
2. Sometimes, but only if combined with diet and exercise.
3. True. It is estimated that they can double your chances of quitting.
4. True. All you have to do is ask for the Consumer Medicine Information leaflet for your particular medicine.

Useful information

CMI leaflet

Consumer Medicine Information (CMI) leaflets have been written for most prescription and many non-prescription medicines. The leaflets explain how the medicine works, how and when to take it, common side effects and potential interactions. Obtain the CMI for your medicine from your pharmacist, NPS Medicines Line or the NPS website (www.nps.org.au/consumers).

Home Medicines Review

A Home Medicines Review (HMR) involves a pharmacist visiting your home to check and discuss all your medicines. The visit is organised in consultation with your GP, who receives a report afterwards. Talk to your GP or pharmacist if you want to find out more about Home Medicines Reviews.

NPS Medicines List

Use an NPS Medicines List to keep an up-to-date record of all your medicines. Keep it with you at all

times for emergencies, and take it whenever you go to a doctor, pharmacist, health centre or hospital. The list is available in English, traditional and simplified Chinese, Greek, Italian and Vietnamese. Order a copy free of charge from the NPS website (www.nps.org.au/consumers).

NPS Medicines Line

Ring NPS Medicines Line on 1300 888 763 to talk to a pharmacist about your prescription, over-the-counter and complementary medicines for the cost of a local call (calls from mobiles may cost more). The service is open 9 am–6 pm Monday–Friday (EST).

Questions to ask about your medicines (new)

A reminder list of questions to ask your doctor or pharmacist is available in English (as a fact sheet) and in traditional and simplified Chinese and Italian (as a wallet-sized list). Order a copy free of charge from the NPS website (www.nps.org.au/consumers).

Who writes MedicinesTalk

MedicinesTalk is written and edited by Ros Wood and Sarah Fogg, and overseen by an Editorial Committee comprising consumer representatives, health professionals and the National Prescribing Service (NPS).

MedicinesTalk is sponsored and published by NPS, an independent non-profit organisation for the Quality Use of Medicines (QUM) funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing.

ISSN: 1447-3208 (print) and 1447-3216 (online)

All due care is taken to provide accurate and reliable information. However, the information in MedicinesTalk is not medical advice, so seek professional help before

making decisions. Opinions expressed in MedicinesTalk are not necessarily those of the editors or NPS.

Spread the word

You are welcome to reproduce articles from MedicinesTalk provided that you reproduce the whole article and acknowledge MedicinesTalk and the National Prescribing Service.

Get your copy of MedicinesTalk

MedicinesTalk is published quarterly free of charge on paper and online. Visit www.nps.org.au/consumers to subscribe to the paper version or view the online version. You can also write to MedicinesTalk, NPS, Reply Paid 1980, Strawberry Hills NSW 2012 or ring 02 8217 8700.