Flourish



ADHD, Sleep Timing, and Melatonin

A Client Fact Sheet

Why sleep is often harder with ADHD

Many people with ADHD struggle with sleep. This is not only about routines or effort. Research shows that ADHD is often linked with differences in sleep timing, meaning the body's internal clock runs later than expected.

Common experiences include:

- Feeling alert late at night
- Not feeling sleepy until very late
- Difficulty waking in the morning
- Doing better mentally later in the day

When sleep timing is off, attention, emotional regulation, and daily functioning usually become harder.

How sleep timing works

The body has an internal clock that helps regulate when we feel awake and when we feel sleepy. This clock is influenced by light, darkness, and daily routines.

When this system runs late, the brain does not send strong sleep signals until very late at night. This pattern is common in people with ADHD and is often described as a delayed sleep schedule.

What melatonin does in the body

Melatonin is a hormone made by the brain. It helps signal that nighttime is starting. Levels usually rise in the evening as light decreases and fall in the morning as light increases.

Melatonin supports sleep timing. It does not work the same way as traditional sleep medications and does not force sleep.

Why melatonin is often discussed with ADHD

Many children and adults with ADHD show later melatonin timing than expected. This means their internal signal for sleep begins later.

Because of this, melatonin has been studied as a way to:

- Support earlier sleep timing
- Reduce how long it takes to fall asleep
- Increase total sleep time in people with delayed schedules

Melatonin supports sleep patterns that often accompany ADHD. It does not treat ADHD itself.

Using Melatonin

Melatonin tends to help people whose sleep schedule runs late. It works best when falling asleep is the main problem, rather than staying asleep. When sleep problems come from other causes, melatonin often does very little.

What research shows in children with ADHD

Studies show that melatonin can help children with ADHD who have difficulty falling asleep by:

- Shortening the time it takes to fall asleep
- Increasing total sleep time
- Shifting sleep timing earlier

These studies show improvement in sleep. They do not consistently show changes in core ADHD symptoms, behavior, or learning.

Long-term safety data in children is still limited, which is why medical guidance matters.

What research shows in adults with ADHD

Adults with ADHD often report delayed sleep timing and difficulty falling asleep.

Research shows that melatonin can:

- Shift sleep timing earlier in adults with delayed schedules
- Improve sleep onset for some people

Changes in ADHD symptoms are usually small and temporary. The strongest benefit remains improved sleep timing.

Safety and practical notes

- Melatonin is a hormone and should be treated as a real medical substance
- Short-term use appears generally safe for many people when medically supervised
- Long-term effects in children are not fully known
- Over-the-counter products vary widely in actual dose, especially gummies
- Accidental ingestion by children is a growing safety concern
- Morning grogginess and medication interactions are possible

Key Point

Melatonin is a sleep-timing support, not an ADHD treatment. For people with ADHD whose sleep schedule runs late, improving sleep timing can reduce daily strain and make other supports easier to use.

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