



Good Health
LIFESTYLES

Educational
BOOKLET
Series

BEYOND SLEEP . . .
DISCOVER THE WHOLE-
BODY MIRACLE OF
MELATONIN

MELATONIN'S
**BRAIN
BENEFITS**

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DISCOVER
THIS POTENT
**IMMUNE
BOOSTER!**

By Kim Erickson

NATURE'S
**INFLAMMATION
FIGHTER**

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YOUR
HEART
HEALTH**

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THE MIGHTY MOLECULE FOR OPTIMAL HEALTH

If you're someone who's facing yet another sleepless night, you might find yourself reaching for melatonin. But if you're only focusing on melatonin's ability to improve your sleep, you're missing out on a host of other health benefits this nutrient provides.

One little-known benefit is melatonin's ability to enhance the immune system. Research has also documented its brain and heart benefits. And the best part? Your body makes its very own supply of melatonin. But as you age, your body produces less and less melatonin—and this can have a negative impact on your health.

Fortunately, adding a melatonin supplement can restore your levels and help you take advantage of all the health-promoting benefits this critical nutrient has to offer. So turn the page and learn how melatonin can help improve your health, naturally!



Kim Erickson is a respected health and medical writer, as well as the editor-in-chief of *Good Health Lifestyles*. In addition, she is the author of *Drop Dead Gorgeous: Protecting Yourself from the Hidden Dangers of Cosmetics* and the co-author of *Living Lessons: My Journey of Faith, Love, and Cutting-Edge Cancer Therapy*. Kim is also a Certified Nutrition and Wellness

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CHAPTER 1

THE MAGIC of Melatonin

Melatonin is a hormone-like compound produced by your body from the amino acid tryptophan and the neurotransmitter serotonin. Technically known as N-acetyl-5-methoxytryptamine, melatonin is primarily created by a small pea-shaped gland in the brain known as the pineal gland.

The production of melatonin depends on your body's response to light and dark. When daylight begins to dim, the retinas in your eyes send a signal to the pineal gland that triggers melatonin production. This, in turn, regulates your sleep-wake cycle and your core body temperature. But the pineal gland isn't the only area of the body that produces melatonin. It is also produced in your gastrointestinal tract by intestinal endocrine cells called enterochromaffin cells. Plus, high concentrations are found in bone marrow and bile.

What makes melatonin a hormone-like compound instead of a true

hormone? Unlike true hormones, which are produced exclusively by the body, melatonin can also be obtained from certain foods like eggs, fish, mushrooms, nuts, seeds, and germinated legumes. You can also augment your body's supply of melatonin with a supplement. And that's a good thing since melatonin production peaks between the ages of one and three years old and then starts to gradually drop as you age.

These diminishing levels can impact more than the quantity and quality of your sleep. As you'll discover in the following pages, melatonin also plays a key role in everything from

reproduction to mood to immune response. But first, let's take a look at the properties that make melatonin such a powerful whole-body protector.

MELATONIN'S ANTIOXIDANT POWER

One way melatonin protects the body is by its ability to increase antioxidants that help cells fight off damaging free radicals. It also binds to harmful reactive oxygen and nitrogen species (ROS and RNS) and neutralizes them. This is critically important because ROS and RNS damage cell structure, including the DNA and RNA that contain your genetic information. This type of damage can lead to a variety of chronic illnesses and can accelerate aging. It's so effective that one lab study found that a single melatonin molecule can neutralize up to 10 ROS and RNS molecules.

How well does the antioxidant power of melatonin work in people? In one randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled trial, athletes were divided into two groups. One was given a daily dose of 20 mg of melatonin while the other group was given a placebo. For the next two weeks, each participant took part in a high-intensity interval training (HIIT) and strength training exercises that induce DNA damage. At the end of the study, the researchers reported that those

80%

The amount of melatonin that is synthesized while you sleep at night, particularly between the hours of 2 a.m. and 4 a.m.

taking melatonin experienced an uptick in antioxidant protection and significantly less DNA damage compared to those in the placebo group. Other human trials show that melatonin supplementation also boosts the antioxidant levels in critically ill patients, which may protect them from oxidative stress.

NATURE'S INFLAMMATION FIGHTER

Melatonin is also a powerful anti-inflammatory that works much like non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) like ibuprofen. But unlike NSAIDs, melatonin produces few side effects. Studies also show that melatonin's anti-inflammatory action may protect healthy cells from becoming damaged by severe inflammation. It may do this by modulating inflammasomes—molecules that are part of your innate immune system. These molecules, which are activated after an injury or during an infection, play a role in generating inflammation.



HOW TO CHOOSE A MELATONIN SUPPLEMENT

Despite all of melatonin's benefits, there is one caveat. Melatonin will make you sleepy—and that's why it's recommended that you take it before bedtime. You can find melatonin supplements in capsule or pill form, as well as a chewable tablet. Some melatonin supplements are also sustained-release formulas. These variations ensure that there's a melatonin supplement to fit everyone's personal needs.

How much should you take? Even though melatonin provides potent antioxidant and anti-inflammatory benefits, taking more isn't necessarily better. Finding the right dose is a highly individual pursuit. For some, taking just 5 mg does the trick. Others need 10 mg or more. To find the dose that's right for you, start with a small dose of melatonin and gradually increase the amount until you discover the dose that works for you.

Although melatonin is generally safe, it's wise to talk with your health care provider if you are taking blood thinners, blood pressure lowering medication, birth control pills, anti-seizure drugs, or some anti-depressants.

CHAPTER 2

Balance Your Immunity WITH MELATONIN

It's no surprise that a strong immune system is essential to help your body deal with the constant barrage of pathogens you are exposed to day in and day out. It's your 24/7 knight in shining armor that keeps you alive and well. A robust immune system:

- Creates a barrier that prevents harmful microorganisms from entering your body.
- Carries out “search and destroy” missions to find and eliminate those bacteria and viruses that do get into your body.
- Prevents dangerous bacteria and viruses from reproducing.
- Triggers the destruction of damaged cells in a process known as apoptosis.

Yet, as efficient as this internal defense system can be, there are a number of things that can weaken your immunity. Topping the list is age. As you grow older, your ability to fight off disease diminishes, possibly because the body is less able to produce immune cells. This

may be why the elderly are more vulnerable to infections. But don't be fooled—young and middle-aged people can experience a less-than-optimal immune response because of chronic stress, an unhealthy diet, lack of exercise, too little sleep, or excessive alcohol use. And this can leave the door open to bacterial or viral infection, as well as more serious conditions. Fortunately, taking a melatonin supplement is an easy way to support optimal immunity, no matter what your age.

A BALANCING ACT

While science hasn't fully uncovered all the ways melatonin regulates immunity, researchers have found that white blood cells—which are the body's primary immune cells—have melatonin receptors. Melatonin appears to stimulate these white blood cells to release cytokines, small messenger proteins that regulate inflammation and how the body responds to an invading infection. In the right amounts, cytokines work with your immune system to modulate the body's response to foreign invaders. This means it stimulates immunity when needed while also guarding against out-of-control inflammation that can trigger an over-reaction to an infection.

BEATING BACK BACTERIA AND VIRUSES

Melatonin improves the body's immune response to a variety of

pathogens, including bacteria, viruses, and parasites. It does this by stimulating the production and the activity of key immune cells such as T cells, natural killer (NK) cells, and macrophages. T cells destroy harmful microbes. NK cells are a type of T cell that bind to and eradicate virus-infected cells. Macrophages gobble up foreign invaders that can make you sick as well as cellular debris. They also produce tumor necrosis factor (TNF), a protein that kills some tumor cells, regulates inflammation, and triggers the creation of new blood vessels. Plus, melatonin regulates several immune system signaling factors needed to mount an effective immune response.

The research on melatonin's immune benefits has primarily focused on bacterial and viral infections. Some studies suggest that melatonin can effectively fight bacterial infections

and may protect against sepsis, a life-threatening condition that can arise from a serious infection. Most research, however, has focused on melatonin and viral infections.

Because melatonin helps to regulate the immune system, studies show that it effectively decreases inflammatory markers like TNF- α and IL-6 and increases anti-inflammatory cytokines like IL-10. Research also shows that melatonin boosts TGF- β , a cytokine that inhibits macrophage activity and counteracts inflammatory cytokines. What does that mean for you and your virus? In the case of influenza, preliminary studies suggest that adding melatonin to conventional medical treatment can indirectly influence the severity of the flu by reducing the odds of developing influenza-induced pneumonia.

Another virus that researchers are taking a close look at in terms of melatonin's benefits is Covid-19. A 2020 study in the journal *Life Sciences* posited that melatonin's antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, and immune-modulating properties may be able to lessen the chances of the virus



causing acute lung injury or acute respiratory distress syndrome. While more study needs to be done, this preliminary research shows promise for Covid-19 as well as other viral infections that impact the respiratory tract.

PROTECTING YOUR DNA

Melatonin's immune-fortifying powers extend well beyond pathogens. It has also been found to benefit some chronic diseases. For example, one study showed that melatonin reduces the free

radicals specifically related to several neurodegenerative diseases like Alzheimer's and Parkinson's diseases. Lab experiments report that melatonin also inhibits the growth of certain cancer cells including breast cancer and melanoma. What's more, a few studies have suggested that combining melatonin with standard chemotherapy might even increase survival time for cancer patients.



STOCK YOUR MELATONIN-BOOSTING "STAY WELL"

Pantry

Adding melatonin to your health regime is a great way to improve your immune system. But did you know that you can also boost your levels with food? The following are excellent sources of dietary melatonin. Add them into your daily meals to further enhance your melatonin levels.



CHAPTER 3

Brain BENEFITS

While taking melatonin is a great way to reset your sleep-wake cycle and boost your immune system, it's also been shown to benefit your brain. This is especially true as you age. Because your body produces less melatonin as you grow older, some researchers think that the uptick in age-related neurodegenerative diseases may be directly linked to a drop in melatonin production. But there may be a silver lining. A growing number of studies suggest that taking supplemental melatonin might have a protective effect on cognitive decline and memory loss.

MELATONIN'S BRAIN-PROTECTIVE POWERS

Recent studies have found that melatonin's antioxidant properties protect the brain from the harmful oxidative stress that can lead to age-related changes in the brain. This may help guard against some degenerative conditions that affect memory and cognition.

Melatonin has also been shown to strengthen the blood-brain

barrier—a protective semi-permeable barrier that prevents harmful substances and pathogens from entering the brain. As we age, the blood-brain barrier begins to break down and becomes less efficient at filtering out compounds that can damage the brain. This infiltration of harmful compounds can also trigger inflammation that, over time, contributes to cognitive decline. In one preliminary study, researchers at the University of Southern California linked a functional loss of the blood-brain barrier to neurodegenerative disorders such as Alzheimer's disease.

Research has also found that melatonin aids in brain regeneration and neuroplasticity by activating brain derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF). BDNF is an important protein that promotes the growth and survival of the neurons that transmit information between different areas of the brain as well as the brain and the rest of the body. This may not only improve brain health as we age, it may also help regenerate brain cells in those with a traumatic brain injury.

MELATONIN AND ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE

Melatonin's ability to protect brain cells and reduce inflammation may help prevent the development of Alzheimer's disease. It may

also help those who have been diagnosed with the condition. Studies show that melatonin protects neurons from the toxic effects of beta-amyloid and tau proteins. This may help stall the development of this memory-altering disease.

Clinical trials report that boosting melatonin through long-term supplementation slows the progression of cognitive impairment and reduces



sundowning. Sundowning is a phenomenon in Alzheimer's patients that causes agitation, irritability, and confusion late in the day. One study found that increasing melatonin levels reduced sundowning in 7 out of 10 Alzheimer's patients.

Supplementation also improves sleep in those with Alzheimer's—an important benefit since about 45 percent of patients suffer from sleep problems.

STROKE RISK AND RECOVERY

Waning melatonin levels have been linked to a greater risk of stroke. This drop in melatonin production is often due to the calcification of the pineal gland. Calcification is simply the accumulation of calcium deposits in the gland that produces melatonin. As calcium builds up, melatonin production goes down. And this is a problem since calcification of the pineal gland increases the risk of stroke by as much as 35 percent.

Low melatonin levels also leave the door open to free-radical

LOW
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damage that can lead to the death of neurons. This, in turn, can also raise the risk of stroke. But animal studies of ischemic stroke report that melatonin improves cognition by scavenging and neutralizing harmful free radicals. During some of these studies, supplementing with melatonin before the stroke lessened the damage caused by a stroke. In fact, supplementing with melatonin not only

improved neurological and behavioral problems related to the stroke, it also helped the animals in the stroke group recover faster by improving the plasticity of neurons in the brain.

Melatonin may also help those who suffer a hemorrhagic stroke—a stroke that is caused by bleeding in the brain. While supplemental melatonin won't lower the risk of this deadly type of stroke, it can effectively reduce brain swelling and the death of neurons after a stroke has occurred. One study that appeared in the *Journal of Research in Pharmacy Practice* found that hemorrhagic stroke patients who were treated with melatonin did not have to be intubated as long and had shorter hospital stays.

Melatonin and MOOD

Researchers at Oregon Health & Science University have found that supplementing with melatonin can relieve the doldrums of winter depression, also known as seasonal affective disorder, or SAD. The researchers behind the study found that misaligned circadian rhythms were a significant factor in seasonal depression. Taking low doses of melatonin seemed to help address the misalignment and reduce symptoms.

Other studies have found that melatonin may also help relieve other forms of depression. For example, a small trial involving 54 women undergoing surgery for breast cancer found that melatonin supplementation reduced the odds of depression during the three months following surgery. Two study reviews also found that melatonin modestly improved the symptoms of depression in people with circadian rhythm dysfunction.



CHAPTER 4

A Healthier HEART

Your heart is among the hardest-working organs in your body—and melatonin can help keep it working at its best. Unfortunately, studies show that people with heart disease typically have low melatonin levels. The news isn't all bad though. Mounting evidence suggests that supplementing with this hormone-like compound can protect the entire cardiovascular system through its anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties. Research shows that melatonin also supports healthy cholesterol and blood pressure levels, even in older people.

HELPS AVERT ATHEROSCLEROSIS

Because melatonin helps tame systemic inflammation and protects against free radical damage, it can play a beneficial role in reducing the risk of atherosclerosis. Atherosclerosis is a condition that develops silently over many years. It starts when the inner lining of your arteries (the endothelium) becomes compromised. This, in turn,

triggers the formation of plaque at the site of the damage. Plaque is a fatty substance made up of oxidized cholesterol, calcium, cellular waste, and a blood-clotting material called fibrin. Over time, this plaque builds up inside your arteries, triggering inflammation that further damages your endothelium and causes your arteries to become narrow and stiff.

As plaque accumulates, it can reduce the amount of blood that flows to your heart, brain, and other vital organs. Worse yet, if the plaque becomes unstable, it can rupture and cause a blood clot to form. This clot can then block the artery and trigger a heart attack or stroke.

A growing number of studies suggest that supplementing with melatonin may help protect against the potentially deadly effects of atherosclerosis. In one study, researchers found that melatonin halted the progression of atherosclerosis by

reducing low-level inflammation. Another study reported that supplementing with melatonin stabilized existing plaque, thus reducing the risk of a blockage that can lead to a cardiovascular event.

FOSTERS A HEALTHIER CHOLESTEROL PROFILE

Melatonin also reduces the risk of atherosclerosis by preventing the oxidation of LDL (bad) cholesterol. Oxidized LDL is a harmful type of cholesterol that is produced in the body when normal LDL cholesterol is damaged by free radicals. This oxidized LDL then reacts with surrounding tissue, damaging the endothelium. If that weren't enough, this reaction also sparks inflammation that contributes to atherosclerosis. Fortunately, the antioxidant properties of melatonin can reduce the odds of LDL oxidation by neutralizing these dangerous free radicals.



But melatonin's lipid-lowering benefits don't stop at oxidized LDL. Other studies show that melatonin also lowers triglycerides and raises HDL (good) cholesterol.

LOWERS BLOOD PRESSURE

High blood pressure is one of the leading causes of heart attack and stroke. But research has found that melatonin can help keep your blood pressure in a healthy range. During one of these studies, researchers documented the blood pressure of 63 seniors. Each participant then took 1.5 mg of melatonin each night for two weeks. The melatonin supplements lowered systolic blood pressure (the top number) by 8 mmHg, while diastolic blood pressure

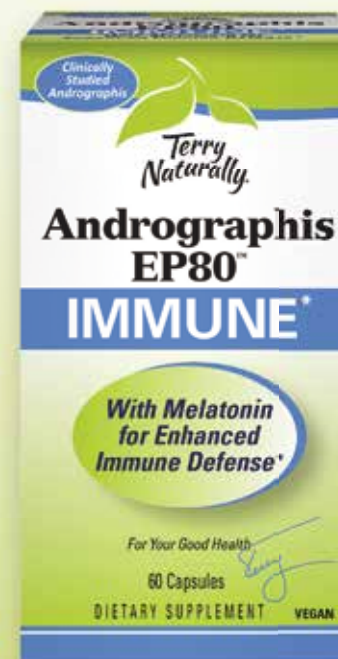
(the bottom number) dropped by 3.5 mmHg. In addition, the participants' average blood pressure dropped more during the second week of supplementation, suggesting that melatonin has a gradually increasing impact on blood pressure levels.

But there's even more good news! According to a report in *Cardiovascular Endocrinology & Metabolism*, melatonin reduces levels of a hormone called catecholamine that is released by the brain and adrenal glands during times of physical and emotional stress. Melatonin also dilates the blood vessels in the arms, legs, hands, and feet by enhancing the production of nitric oxide.

THE HEART FAILURE CONNECTION

Some studies suggest that supplementing with melatonin may also help those with congestive heart failure (CHF) by reducing factors like oxidative stress and high blood pressure. If you've been diagnosed with CHF, talk with your health care provider to see if melatonin might benefit you.

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MELATONIN'S *Bonus Benefits*

Melatonin's ability to enhance your immune system while helping to protect your brain and heart make it a smart addition to your daily supplement routine. But it turns out that this sleep-enhancing compound can also offer a multitude of other benefits.



MAY PROTECT AGAINST DIABETES

New evidence suggests that the natural age-related decrease in melatonin may be linked to the development of type 2 diabetes. In one study, women with low levels of melatonin had more than twice the risk of developing type 2 diabetes, even after body weight and diet were taken into consideration. In animal studies, diabetic rats treated with melatonin experienced improved liver function and appeared to be protected against insulin resistance.



MAY GUARD AGAINST GERD

Several studies suggest that low melatonin levels in the stomach could be related to digestive issues, like GERD, heartburn, and ulcers. However data suggests that melatonin supplementation may be an effective remedy for heartburn and GERD. It may also be effective for treating ulcers.



MIGHT BOOST FERTILITY

Research suggests that melatonin's antioxidant properties help optimize ovarian health and enhance fertility. In a study of 115 women, melatonin increased egg quality by reducing oxidation and delaying ovarian aging. But this may not be the only way melatonin supports healthy fertility. Because melatonin also controls body temperature and female reproductive hormones, it's likely that there are many other ways in which a healthy melatonin level could help women conceive.



RELIEVES TINNITUS

Tinnitus, or ringing in the ears, is a common problem for millions of people. But scientists at the University of Texas have found that melatonin was 150 times more effective than pharmaceuticals at decreasing tinnitus.

HELPS MAINTAIN VISION

Adequate melatonin levels protect the cells in the eyes from cell death and decrease pressure in the eyes. So it's no surprise that low levels early in life can increase the odds of future vision problems like glaucoma. Melatonin plays such a critical role in maintaining healthy vision that some scientists believe that a disturbance in its production may be one of the causes of glaucoma.



MIGHT STOP HAIR LOSS

Used topically, melatonin might help treat age-related hair loss as well as alopecia. One study of 30 men and women with alopecia found that topically applied melatonin increased hair density by 29 percent after 30 days and 41 percent after 90 days of use.



EASES MIGRAINES

One promising study published in the journal *Neurology* found that daily 3 mg doses of melatonin helped reduce the frequency of migraines. More than three-quarters of the research participants reported experiencing at least 50 percent fewer migraine attacks. Melatonin therapy also appeared to reduce the length of migraine attacks, as well as the severity.



JETTISONS JET LAG

Jet lag is a temporary condition that occurs when you move through multiple time zones quickly, such as during a cross-country or overseas flight. One large study review found that melatonin effectively decreased jet lag in people crossing five or more time zones. The study also noted that the supplement was most effective when taken shortly before bedtime once you've arrived at your final destination.



IMPROVES SLEEP

Melatonin's ability to improve sleep is its best-known benefit. Prolonged-release melatonin has been shown to be safe and effective for people suffering from insomnia. In one study of people age 55 and older, melatonin greatly improved sleep quality and daytime alertness. Other research reports that supplementing with melatonin can help you fall asleep and stay asleep by improving your total sleep time.



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