

Little evidence of effectiveness of antidepressants for insomnia in adults

Clinical Question	Compared to placebo, other medications for insomnia (e.g. benzodiazepines or 'Z' drugs), a different antidepressant, waiting list control or 'treatment as usual', how effective are antidepressants for insomnia in adults?
Bottom Line	There were only a small number of studies with short-term follow-up on the use of antidepressants for managing primary insomnia. These provided only equivocal data supporting short-term (weeks rather than months) use for some tricyclic antidepressants (doxepin in low dose), and for trazodone, but no evidence to support long-term use. There was no evidence for amitriptyline despite its common use in clinical practice, or to support long-term antidepressant use for insomnia. Current research evidence does not support the widespread practice of prescribing antidepressants for insomnia.
Caveat	Most of the studies were small with short-term follow-up and design limitations. The effects of selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors compared with placebo were uncertain with too few studies to draw clear conclusions. The tolerability and safety of antidepressants for insomnia was uncertain due to limited reporting of adverse events.
Context	Antidepressant use for insomnia is widespread, but none is licensed for insomnia and the evidence for their efficacy is unclear. This use of unlicensed medications may be driven by concern over longer-term use of hypnotics (risks of tolerance and dependence) and the limited availability of psychological treatments.
Cochrane Systematic Review	Everitt H et al. Antidepressants for insomnia in adults. Cochrane Reviews, 2018, Issue 5. Art. No.: CD010753.DOI: 10.1002/14651858. CD010753.pub2. This review contains 23 studies involving 2,806 participants.

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