

Melatonin in children: let's talk about it together!

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Let's talk about it together

At "Learning to Sleep Like Learning to Walk," we know that **melatonin raises a lot of doubts and questions** among parents. And that's normal!

Here are some questions we often hear from parents:

"My child has trouble falling asleep... is it really safe to give them melatonin?"

"I'm afraid they'll **get used to it**... could they end up not being able to fall asleep without it?"

"I sometimes read that it can affect hormones... could it harm their growth later on?"

"When I see all the different products on the shelves, I wonder: how can I be sure that the one I'm buying is **reliable**?"

Thanks to a grant from the Quebec Sleep Research Network, we will **attempt to answer your questions based on current scientific knowledge** through future **articles or tools** to be released during 2025-2026. (No individual responses will be provided.)

Considering what we know to date (see below for an overview), we would like to hear your questions.

All your questions and comments are valid and will remain anonymous.

What would you like to understand about melatonin?

What experiences or concerns would you like to share?

Please feel free to write to us; we need your insights to support you with evidence-based data and shed light on this health choice.

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A quick look at what we know

Melatonin does much more than regulate sleep

Melatonin is a hormone produced by the brain, more specifically by the pineal gland. It is often associated solely with sleep because it increases in our bodies at night, but its role goes far beyond that.

 It acts mainly on the hypothalamus, a part of the brain that controls several vital functions. • It also has effects on various organs and tissues: the liver, pancreas, endocrine glands, adipose tissue, muscles, heart, blood vessels, and even the immune system.

Melatonin does not only help you fall asleep; its effects are much broader.

A look at the situation in Canada

In Canada, melatonin is easy to find in pharmacies because it is considered a **dietary supplement** (and **not a sleeping pill**). This is not the case everywhere, and in several countries (the United Kingdom, Norway, Japan, Australia), it is only available with a prescription.

Here is what we know:

- The quality of products varies greatly: some analyses have shown inaccurate doses and even the presence of unlisted substances such as serotonin.
- Medical consultations and cases of melatonin poisoning are on the rise.
- No products are currently approved for children and adolescents under 18 in Canada.

Be sure to always keep melatonin out of the reach of children.

What science says

There are still **very few studies** on the effects of short-term melatonin use and even fewer on long-term use in typically developing children. A few studies exist on its use under medical supervision in children with neuroatypical development (ADHD, ASD).

Before using melatonin, it is best to **talk to a healthcare professional**. Only healthcare specialists are qualified to provide medical advice.

Texts to learn more as a parent:

- Naitre et Grandir. (2023) Mélatonine: la solution aux problèmes de sommeil des enfants?
- Naître et grandir. (2024). Problème de sommeil: donner ou non de la mélatonine à un enfant?

Inspiration and scientific sources:

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 Characteristics of Melatonin Use Among US Children and Adolescents. *JAMA Pediatrics*, 178(1), 91–93. https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2023.4749
- McCarthy, C. (2022). New advice on melatonin use in children: An advisory is issued on over-the-counter melatonin supplements. Harvard Health Publishing.
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- Rzepka-Migut, B., & Paprocka, J. (2020). Efficacy and Safety of Melatonin Treatment in Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder and Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder-A Review of the Literature. *Brain Sciences*, 10(4). https://doi.org/10.3390/brainsci10040219
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 CADTH Health Technology. https://www.cda-amc.ca/sites/default/files/pdf/htis/2022/RC1423%20%20Melatonin%20Insomnia%20Peds%20Final.pdf