

Z-drugs (Zopiclone, Zolpidem, Zaleplon)

Why have I received this letter?

Our records suggest you are taking a sleeping tablet called a “Z-drug” (zopiclone, zolpidem, or zaleplon). These are commonly prescribed for short-term insomnia.

What do I need to know?

- Z-drugs are similar to benzodiazepines and are only intended for short-term use.
- Risks with longer-term use include:
 - Tolerance: they stop working as well over time.
 - Dependence: stopping suddenly may cause withdrawal and rebound insomnia.
 - Side effects: drowsiness, dizziness, metallic taste, poor memory.
 - Falls and accidents: higher risk of falls, especially in older people. Sadly, falls related to night-time sedation can sometimes be severe and even result in death.
 - Driving and accidents: you may be unsafe to drive the morning after taking them, and there have been cases of serious or fatal accidents linked to next-day drowsiness.
 - Overdose risk: taking more than prescribed, or combining with alcohol, opioids, or benzodiazepines, can slow breathing and in some cases lead to death.

Alternatives to medication:

- Sleep hygiene advice (regular sleep routine, avoiding caffeine/alcohol, screen-free time before bed).
- Talking therapies such as CBT for insomnia (CBT-I).

You may find the following resources helpful:

- Humber Recovery College – Sleep Course:
<https://humberrecoverycollege.nhs.uk/course/56>
- Silvercloud Sleep Module (access code HUMBER):
<https://www.humber.nhs.uk/services/silvercloud-primary-packages.htm>
- NHS Every Mind Matters – Sleep: <https://www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/mental-health-issues/sleep/>
- HNY Health Apps Library – Sleep Apps: <https://hnyhealthapps.co.uk/>
- Reading Well – Books on Prescription: Sleep: <https://reading-well.org.uk/books/books-on-prescription/12072514>

Where can I find more information?

- NHS: Zopiclone: <https://www.nhs.uk/medicines/zopiclone/> | Zolpidem: <https://www.nhs.uk/medicines/zolpidem/>
- NICE: Insomnia management: <https://cks.nice.org.uk/topics/insomnia/>

- Sleep support: Sleepstation: <https://www.sleepstation.org.uk/> | The Sleep Charity: <https://thesleepcharity.org.uk/>