

# Trazodone for Sleep: Important Patient Information

## Why SleepScriptMD May Recommend Trazodone

Trazodone is an older prescription medication that is commonly used off-label for insomnia. “Off-label” means the medication is being used for a medically accepted purpose that is different from its original FDA-approved use.

At higher doses, trazodone was originally developed and FDA-approved as an antidepressant. In modern real-world sleep care, however, it is much more commonly used at lower bedtime doses to help with sleep — especially sleep maintenance, nighttime awakenings, and difficulty returning to sleep.

SleepScriptMD does **not** prescribe trazodone as an antidepressant. When prescribed through SleepScriptMD, it is being used as a non-addictive sleep medication option.

## FDA Boxed Warning: Suicidal Thoughts and Behaviors

Even though SleepScriptMD uses trazodone for insomnia rather than depression, trazodone still carries the standard FDA boxed warning for antidepressant medications.

Antidepressant medications may increase the risk of suicidal thoughts and behaviors in children, teenagers, and young adults, especially early in treatment or when the dose is changed. Trazodone is not approved for pediatric patients.

SleepScriptMD treats adults only, but all patients should monitor for new or worsening:

- Depression
- Anxiety or panic
- Agitation or irritability
- Restlessness
- Impulsivity
- Unusual behavior changes
- Suicidal thoughts
- Thoughts of self-harm

Contact your clinician promptly if these symptoms occur. If you may harm yourself or someone else, call **988 or 911 immediately**.

## Why Trazodone Can Help Sleep

At lower bedtime doses, trazodone can promote sleepiness through its effects on serotonin, histamine, and alpha-1 adrenergic receptors. In plain English, it can help calm the brain and body enough to make sleep easier.

It may be especially useful for patients who:

- Wake up often during the night
- Fall asleep but cannot stay asleep
- Want to avoid controlled or habit-forming sleep medications
- Have tried basic sleep hygiene without enough improvement
- Need a medication that is not a benzodiazepine, “Z-drug,” or addictive sedative

## Is Trazodone Addictive?

Trazodone is **not considered addictive** and is not a controlled substance. It does not typically cause cravings, drug-seeking behavior, or the same dependence concerns associated with medications like benzodiazepines or certain prescription hypnotics.

That said, any sleep medication should be used thoughtfully. The goal is better sleep — not simply taking more medication.

## How to Take Trazodone for Insomnia

Follow your clinician’s exact instructions. Most patients take trazodone:

- Once nightly
- About 30–60 minutes before bed
- Only when they have enough time for a full night of sleep
- Without alcohol or other sedating substances

Do not increase the dose on your own. If the medication is not working well enough, contact your clinician rather than taking extra.

## What Trazodone Feels Like

Many patients describe trazodone as making them feel naturally sleepy, heavier, or more ready for bed. It is not usually a “knockout” medication, and it may not work the same way every night.

Some people notice improvement the first night. Others need several nights to judge whether it is helping.

## Common Side Effects

Common side effects may include:

- Morning grogginess or “hangover” feeling
- Dizziness or lightheadedness
- Dry mouth
- Headache
- Nausea
- Constipation
- Vivid dreams
- Fatigue
- Blurred vision
- Lower blood pressure when standing

If you feel dizzy, sit or lie down and stand up slowly. This is especially important during the first few doses or after a dose increase.

## **Avoid Alcohol and Other Sedatives**

Do not combine trazodone with alcohol. Alcohol can increase sedation, worsen sleep quality, impair breathing, and raise the risk of falls, confusion, or overdose.

Use extra caution if you also take medications that cause sedation, including:

- Benzodiazepines such as Xanax, Ativan, Klonopin, or Valium
- Opioid pain medications
- Muscle relaxers
- Some antihistamines, including Benadryl
- Other sleep medications
- Cannabis or THC products

Tell your clinician about everything you take, including prescriptions, supplements, and over-the-counter products.

## **Serious but Rare Risks**

Most patients tolerate trazodone well, but rare serious side effects can occur.

### **Priapism**

Trazodone has rarely been associated with priapism, which is a painful or prolonged erection. This is a medical emergency.

Seek emergency care immediately if an erection lasts more than 4 hours or is painful. Waiting too long can cause permanent damage.

### **Abnormal Heart Rhythm / QT Prolongation**

Trazodone can rarely affect heart rhythm, especially in people with certain heart conditions, electrolyte abnormalities, high doses, or interacting medications.

Tell your clinician if you have:

- Long QT syndrome
- A history of fainting or unexplained passing out
- Serious heart rhythm problems
- Recent heart attack
- Low potassium or magnesium
- Use of other QT-prolonging medications

## **Serotonin Syndrome**

Serotonin syndrome is rare but potentially serious. Risk is higher when trazodone is combined with other serotonin-increasing medications or supplements.

Seek urgent care for symptoms such as:

- Agitation or confusion
- Fever
- Heavy sweating
- Muscle stiffness
- Tremor
- Diarrhea
- Fast heart rate
- Hallucinations
- Loss of coordination

Important interacting substances can include SSRIs, SNRIs, MAOIs, tramadol, linezolid, lithium, triptans, MDMA, St. John's Wort, and tryptophan.

## **Bleeding Risk**

Trazodone may slightly increase bleeding risk, especially when combined with aspirin, NSAIDs such as ibuprofen or naproxen, blood thinners, or antiplatelet medications.

Tell your clinician if you take warfarin, Eliquis, Xarelto, Plavix, aspirin, or frequent NSAIDs.

## **Who Should Use Extra Caution**

Trazodone may not be the right fit, or may require extra caution, if you have:

- Bipolar disorder or history of mania
- Seizure disorder
- Significant liver or kidney disease
- Serious heart disease

- Long QT syndrome
- Low blood pressure or frequent fainting
- Untreated sleep apnea
- Heavy alcohol use
- Current use of multiple sedating medications
- Pregnancy or breastfeeding
- History of priapism
- Conditions that increase priapism risk, such as sickle cell disease, multiple myeloma, leukemia, or Peyronie's disease

## When to Contact Your Clinician

Contact your clinician if:

- Trazodone is not helping after several nights
- You feel too groggy the next morning
- You feel dizzy, faint, confused, or unsteady
- Your sleep becomes worse
- You have new mood changes
- You want to stop or change the dose
- You start a new medication or supplement

Do not combine trazodone with other sleep medications unless your clinician specifically tells you to.

## Overdose Warning

Taking too much trazodone can be dangerous. Signs of overdose may include:

- Extreme sleepiness
- Vomiting
- Confusion
- Fainting
- Irregular heartbeat
- Seizure
- Trouble breathing
- Painful or prolonged erection

For possible overdose, call Poison Control at **1-800-222-1222** or call **911**.

## Bottom Line

Trazodone is not prescribed by SleepScriptMD as an antidepressant. It is used at bedtime as an off-label, non-addictive insomnia medication option.

It can be very helpful for the right patient, especially when nighttime awakenings are a major problem. Like any prescription medication, it should be used carefully, at the prescribed dose, and without alcohol or unsafe sedative combinations.

## **Full Side Effect and Interaction Information**

This handout highlights the most important and most common safety issues, but it is not a complete list of every possible side effect, warning, or medication interaction.

For the full official prescribing information, including complete adverse reactions, warnings, and drug interaction details, patients can review the FDA/DailyMed trazodone label here:

<https://dailymed.nlm.nih.gov/dailymed/drugInfo.cfm?setid=ed3039d8-3d27-4b71-a4b0-812943c9457f>

For a more patient-friendly overview of trazodone side effects and precautions, patients can review MedlinePlus here:

<https://medlineplus.gov/druginfo/meds/a681038.html>

Patients should also tell their SleepScriptMD clinician and pharmacist about all prescription medications, over-the-counter medications, supplements, cannabis/THC products, and alcohol use before starting trazodone.