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## ADVICE

### DEAR PHARMACIST

#### Milk proteins to break stress

**Dear Pharmacist: When I was young, my mother made me drink warm milk before bed to help me sleep. Why does it make you drowsy? Do you recommend it for insomnia?**

— G.G., Coral Springs

**Dear G.G.:** There are two reasons why milk may cause drowsiness: tryptophan and another protein called milk protein hydrolysate.

First, tryptophan. It's a "miniature" protein (an amino acid, actually) that your body uses to make serotonin, a chemical that slows down all the chattering in your brain and organizes nerve traffic. Serotonin in turn makes melatonin, which you need to fall, and stay, asleep. Serotonin also is the same chemical whose level the powerful drugs Paxil, Zoloff and Prozac boost.



SUZY COHEN

The other item in milk is milk protein hydrolysate, which is very relaxing. It can help induce better sleep. It's sold under the brand name Lactium. It is a great stress buster and people who know about it use it like a Xanax. Lactium could be taken as needed, about an hour before that nerve-racking meeting. Effects of the stress-buster last about six hours.

You asked if I recommend milk for insomnia. I don't. Too many people are sensitive to the lactose or the casein in it. Also, lots of people have chronic allergies, respiratory infections, sinus issues or asthma, and milk is often a trigger for them. Most practitioners don't suggest that such people drink mucous-forming beverages. Finally, people who snore should avoid milk at bedtime for the same reason: Mucous flapping in your airway will make you snore more violently.

I would try the Lactium first (see [www.lactium.com](http://www.lactium.com)). Take 150 mg an hour before bedtime. Try it for two weeks and, if you are still not sleeping better, then bring in high-quality melatonin, about 1 mg at bedtime. Bear in mind that the melatonin takes a few weeks to begin working and you have to stay on it; you can't just take it once in a while. Do this for a month. If you're not any better, drop the Lactium, keep the melatonin and bring in tryptophan, sold as 5-HTP. Take 50 mg an hour before bedtime. Make sure your doctor says this is all OK, because these supplements may interact with other medications.

*This information is not intended to treat, cure or diagnose your condition. Always consult your physician. Suzy Cohen is a registered pharmacist. For more information or to contact her, visit [www.dearpharmacist.com](http://www.dearpharmacist.com).*