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YOUR HEALTH & FITNESS



# SHRINK YOUR BELLY

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**BE STRONG & SEXY**





## What supplements can you safely take for insomnia?

BY DR. JULIE T. CHEN, M.D.

Dr. Julie, I have trouble falling asleep but once I am asleep, I sleep well. I tend to react to low dosages of medications. Can you suggest some mild supplement options for insomnia? I also tend to have low mood or anxiety if I don't get enough sleep. My mood issues are not severe and my doctor says I don't have depression.

**S**LEEP is essential for the body to heal and for most people how we feel and perform the next day depends on how well we've slept the night before. I personally am not at my best if I don't get a good night of sleep. So, what can you use for insomnia without creating a dependency on medications or supplements? In my clinic of integrative medicine in San Jose CA, I usually recommend a few supplements as a starting point for insomnia. These tend to be safe for the general public and people taking them need not worry about becoming dependent on them. My top three favorites are theanine, magnesium and 5-HTP or L-Tryptophan.

Theanine is an amino acid that helps to reduce anxiety and promote relaxation and rest. It is mild and can be used by those who can't shut off their mind when trying to go to sleep. You would take 100-200mg about 10 minutes before bed.

Magnesium is great at reducing anxiety and helping with quality of sleep as well. First have your doctor check your magnesium level and make sure you are safe to take it. Your doctor can then prescribe a dosage based on your labs. Magnesium is also

necessary for muscle activity and will help those with leg cramps or muscle tightness and spasms. It tends to loosen your stool so it will help with constipation, but be wary if you have a tendency towards loose stools or diarrhea. Those with kidney disease may not be able to clear this, so check with your doctor first.

5-HTP or L-tryptophan has the added benefit of helping your mood and helps to put you to sleep. If you have low mood and insomnia, this is potentially a good option. I generally recommend about 100-200mg of 5-HTP or 500mg of L-tryptophan per night for the average person with average weight and health. If you are on antidepressants or any other drugs that already have serotonin effects, you should clear it with your doctor before trying it.

Although these options tend to have the most benefit with the least amount of problems and grogginess in the mornings, there is still potential for interactions if you are on other supplements and medications *so please clear any new supplements with your doctor.*

Many of you with insomnia may already know about supplements like valerian root,



lemon balm, melatonin, kava kava and passionflower, to name a few. In my experience these tend to cause more drowsiness in the morning and potentially have more side effects if you have environmental allergies to various plants. Having said that, these are still viable options for those with severe insomnia who need stronger agents to get to sleep.

Always clear your supplements with your doctor to make sure you are being safe. Practice good sleep hygiene by avoiding caffeine, turning down the lights a few hours before bed to get your body more relaxed and increase your own melatonin. Don't do energizing activities like work or watch stressful TV shows before bed. Ultimately, good sleep hygiene is the most effective and safest way to help your body enter naturally into the restful stages of sleep you so desperately crave. **Z**

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*Dr. Julie T. Chen, MD, is an integrative medicine physician with her own practice in San Jose, CA. Check out her website at [makinghealthyez.com](http://makinghealthyez.com).*