

## Sleep Problems and Aspirin Use in Pain

By Dr. Fred Raleigh, Plus Magazine, Jan. 2007

**Question:** Over the years my activity level has dropped due to increasing aches and pains in my hips and knees. At the current age of 84 I take some blood pressure medication, one medication for my diabetes and one medication to keep my serum lipid's level low. I also take a baby aspirin on a daily basis.

Would it be okay to take 1 or 2 regular aspirin for the pain in my hips and knees?

EB San Luis Obispo

**Answer:** Yes, it would be okay to take one or two aspirin for your joint pain. Now I say this with some cautions that I have outlined below for you.

1. Aspirin can thin your blood so you should watch to make sure that you are not bruising easy when you bump into things. This could indicate that your daily dose of aspirin is a bit to high.
2. Aspirin can irritate your stomach's lining and if you take to much you may develop an ulcer. In fact excessive aspirin use and/or the use of members of the non-steroidal anti-inflammatories, like Advil<sup>®</sup>, are perhaps the leading cause of drug induced ulcers in the elderly. You can use an enteric coated aspirin to help reduce some of this irritation or you can use an

arthritic strength aspirin and follow the instructions on the package. Remember none of these coated or time released products will fully protect you from possible gastrointestinal problems. To make sure you are not experiencing any stomach or intestinal irritation that could be harmful please talk to your doctor about periodic occult blood tests. You can also watch for tarry looking stools which would indicate gastrointestinal bleeding.

3. The trick here is to find the dose of aspirin that helps your pain but does not cause major problems.
4. Pain, if it is of a persistent nature, is best treated when medications are taken on a consistent basis. If your pain comes and goes taking medication on an as needed basis is okay.
5. Finally I would suggest that you talk to your doctor about the bothersome pain. S/he might have some other useful suggestions.

Q. I have been taking Ambien<sup>®</sup>, the brand name for zolpidem, for several years as an aid to help my poor sleeping patterns. Lately I have noticed that when I take the medication, 10mg at bedtime, I get a wonderful night's sleep; yet the next day, I have begun to perceive that I am very verbally aggressive. For me this is not good as I must interact with business clients on a daily basis. I have also observed that the next night after taking the product I do not get a peaceful night's sleep.

Furthermore, I have discovered that if I take the product for two or three nights in a row I begin to feel like a zombie during my waking hours.

Can you help me figure out what is going on here?

EF Paso Robles

- A. I would begin by saying that it appears that you may be having an adverse effect from the use of the Ambien. It also seems, from your description, that you may be experiencing drug accumulation. Let me explain what may be going on here.

Ambien is a central nervous system depressant; thus its action on helping you sleep. Though few people experience bothersome adverse side effects your problem sounds significant considering your line of work.

A common problem seen with the build up of, or the use of too much of a central nervous system depressant is the loss of inhibitions. You may have experienced people who become “mean” drunks as a result of losing their inhibitions. Interestingly the manufacture of this product does list aggressive behavior both emotional or physical associated with the use of their product.

The second issue you asked for help with deals with what appears to be a drug build-up in your system. This would account for your sensation of feeling like a

zombie after taking the product for a few days in a row. Again, as with the issue of aggression, there are reports of this medication building up in susceptible individual's system resulting in phenomena similar to what you have described.

My suggestion would be to do the following:

Take just 5 milligrams of the Ambien and see if you experience the same problems the next day or evening. If you do, then perhaps this medication is no longer right for you. You should also discuss this matter with your prescribing physician. There are many other sleep aids that you could benefit from.