- Hormones

THE UPSHOT

Melatonin

Lots of people pop a gummy to sleep, but should you?

BY KORIN MILLER

Speaking solely about melatonin (not CBD or THC gummies), the answer is probably not, and definitely not regularly. "Melatonin should not be thought of as a treatment for insomnia," says Andrew R. Spector, M.D., a sleep-medicine specialist and an associate professor of neurology at Duke University School of Medicine. "We need to move away from the idea that melatonin is a sleeping pill to take every night to fall asleep faster or stay asleep longer." Here's what you need to know:

Melatonin is a hormone your body produces in response to darkness to regulate your internal clock. Taking a supplement can increase the amount of it in your system, which signals your body that it's time to sleep. But doctors say these supplements should be used only under very specific circumstances and not as sedatives. "Melatonin is indicated for the treatment of circadian rhythm disorders and REM sleep behavior disorder," and sometimes if beta blockers are disrupting sleep, says Dr. Spector. People whose circadian rhythm is temporarily out of whack (say, due to jet lag) might use it briefly to get back to normal; otherwise, doctors usually advise against it, as there's no good data on long-term effects. "It rarely makes sense for the average adult—much less the average child—to take melatonin," says W. Christopher Winter, M.D., a neurologist and sleep medicine physician with Charlottesville Neurology and Sleep Medicine and the host of the podcast *Sleep Unplugged*. He doesn't recommend taking melatonin every night unless directed to do so by a sleep specialist.

Plus, many who take melatonin take too much, doctors say, and may wind up groggy, confused, or disoriented in the morning. (There's also a risk that gummy formulations may contain more than the labeled amount.) "When treating circadian rhythm disorders,

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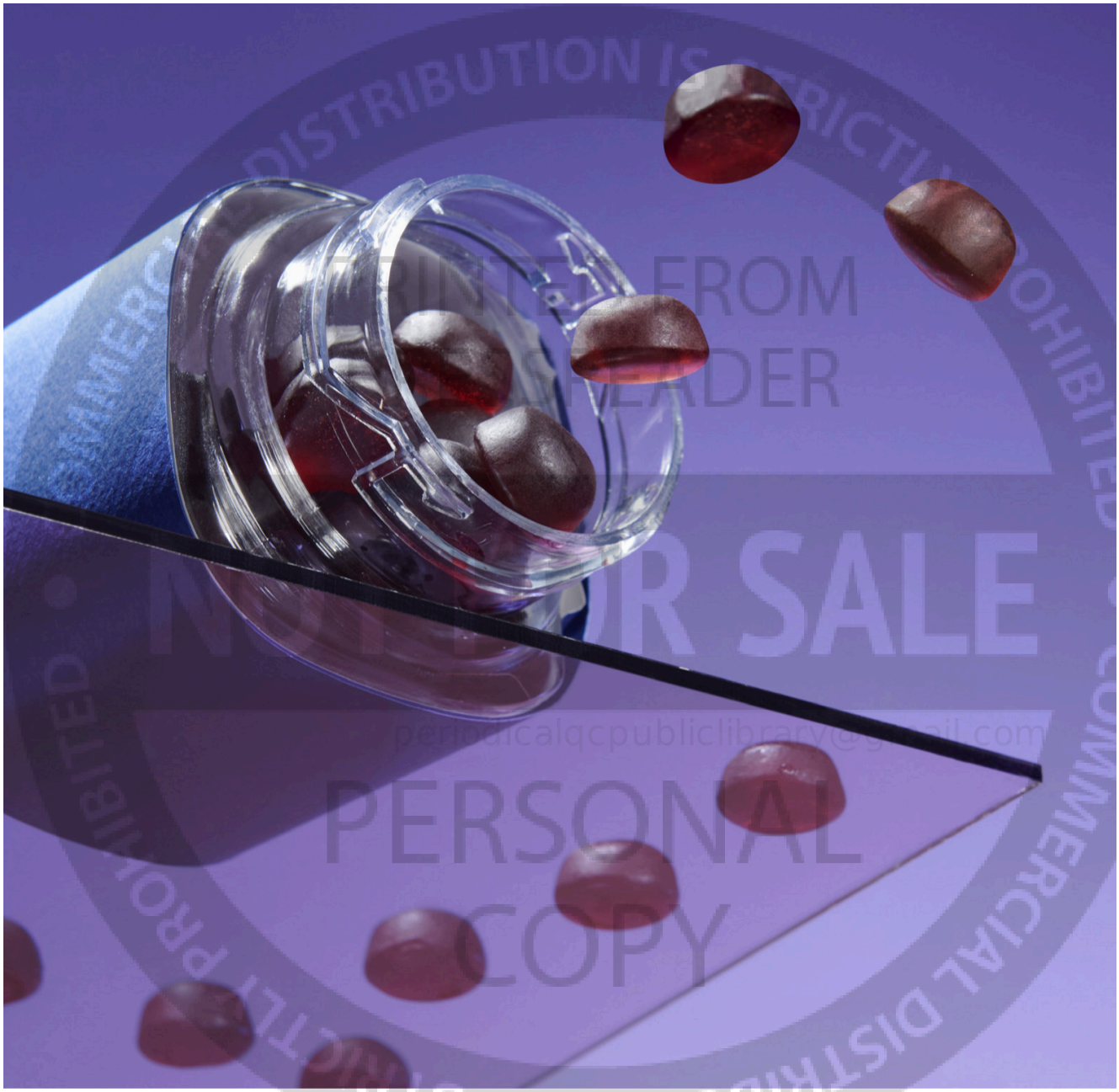

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a typical dose is 0.5 mg," says Dr. Spector. If you're having trouble sleeping because you take beta blockers, he suggests taking between 2.5 mg and 3 mg. For jet lag, 3 mg to 5 mg may be a good dose, says Dr. Winter. And bear in mind that some meds—including blood thinners, anti-seizure and diabetes drugs, and birth control pills—can interact with melatonin.

The bottom line: Talk to your doctor before taking melatonin, and if you are struggling with sleep even with good sleep habits, see a specialist.

Sleep is so important! For tips on getting a good night's sleep, head to prevention.com/sleep-tips.