

Media release

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Sleeping tablets are not the answer according to an article in *Australian Prescriber*

Hypnotic medicines (sleeping tablets) have a very limited role in the treatment of insomnia and should only be prescribed once other avenues have been explored, according to an article written by Professor John Tiller in this month's issue of *Australian Prescriber*.

"Up to 25% of Australians suffer from insomnia. This common ailment can be caused by medical, psychological or environmental problems. Treatment of the underlying problem is a crucial part of the solution and hypnotic medicines are not always the best answer," Professor Tiller said.

Issues that contribute to insomnia are psychological or anxiety disorders; environmental factors such as if a person's bedroom is too hot, cold or noisy, if a bed is uncomfortable or if a partner or child is restless; and physical factors such as cardiac and respiratory failure or if a person is suffering from some form of pain.

If a hypnotic medication is needed, Professor Tiller believes that communication between the doctor and patient plays a vital role. The hypnotic should only be used for a few nights to ensure the patient does not become dependent on the medication.

In the same issue of *Australian Prescriber*, Dr Ian Hamilton-Craig, a cardiologist at Repatriation General Hospital and North Adelaide Cardiac Clinic, Adelaide, discusses the muscle damage that can be caused by 'statins' (cholesterol lowering medications).

"Although the risk of muscle damage due to statins is low, GPs and patients should be aware of this side effect so they can discuss any symptoms as soon as they occur," Dr Hamilton-Craig said.

"The symptoms patients may experience vary from mild muscle aches to severe pain. The risk of muscle damage occurring as a result of statins is increased if they are elderly, have other health problems, low body weight or are female. In mild to moderate cases, stopping the medication is the only treatment and symptoms usually improve almost immediately," he continued.

This issue of *Australian Prescriber* also includes articles by Harvey Coates and Kim Gifkins on newborn hearing screening, Peter Hickman and Julia Potter on new markers for heart disease, and Richard O'Brien on immunotherapy for allergic disorders.

For the complete articles visit the *Australian Prescriber* website at www.australianprescriber.com *Australian Prescriber* is an independent review journal providing critical commentary on therapeutic topics for health professionals, is published by the National Prescribing Service (NPS). The NPS is an independent Australian organisation for Quality Use of Medicines. For further information about the NPS visit the web site www.nps.org.au

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