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Melatonin

There seems to be a renewal of interest in the pineal gland and its hormone, melatonin. A review in the *Journal of Pediatrics* (1994; **123**: 843–51) summarises recent work on the role of melatonin in human physiology. In seasonally breeding animals melatonin secretion is concerned in reproductive activity but human studies have failed to assign it a definite place in reproductive endocrinology. It does, though, seem to be involved in the establishment of day-night rhythms. Some blind people have sleep problems because they do not establish a normal rhythm and treatment with melatonin has improved their sleep patterns. It also improves symptoms of jet lag in normal people. A report in *Developmental Medicine and Child Neurology* (1994; **36**: 97–107) concerns 15 children with severe neurodevelopmental disability, nine of whom were blind. All had sleep disturbance which had failed to respond to conventional management and which was causing severe family disruption. All of the families reported benefit when the children were given oral melatonin. There are no known adverse effects of such treatment.

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