

New medication brings hope of jet lag cure

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A team of researchers from Monash University, The Brigham and Women's Hospital (Boston), Harvard Medical School and Vanda Pharmaceuticals has found a new drug with the potential to alleviate jet lag and sleep disorders caused by shift work.

Dr Shantha Rajaratnam from Monash University's School of Psychology, Psychiatry and Psychological Medicine said tasimelteon, a drug which acts on melatonin receptors in the brain, could be a highly effective treatment for circadian rhythm sleep disorders.

The research was released today in respected publication, *The Lancet*.

"Our studies show that tasimelteon is able to effectively shift the rhythm of melatonin levels in the body, which are a well-established marker of the human biological clock," Dr Rajaratnam said.

"This drug has the potential to improve the quality and quantity of sleep for patients with transient insomnia caused by jet lag.

"Tasimelteon improved a patient's ability to fall asleep and then stay asleep when bedtime was shifted earlier by five hours.

"This is the equivalent of travelling eastwards and putting your clock back five hours, such as returning from India to Melbourne, or Dubai to Perth.

"About two thirds of all international travellers who cross time zones experience jet lag symptoms, which include disruption of sleep, difficulty getting to and staying asleep, sleepiness during waking hours and gastrointestinal symptoms."

He said the drug could also help those who work at night or early in the morning.

"An estimated one in five work outside the regular nine-to-five pattern. In the United states alone it is estimated 19.7 million people start work between 2.30 and 7 am," Dr Rajaratnam said.

"Our work has shown the drug to be highly potent, having the strongest effect when first taken; a single dose treatment was found to be effective for this type of sleep disturbance."

The drug is in the later stages of trials and must undergo rigorous testing before being made available to consumers.

Source: Monash University

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