**DRUG NAME:** AMBIEN, AMBIEN CR  
Generic name: zolpidem

**General Information:** Ambien is a medication used for various sleep problems, such as trouble falling asleep, waking up too early in the morning, or waking up often during the night. Sleep problems are usually temporary, requiring treatment for only a short time, 1 or 2 days up to 1 or 2 weeks. Chronic sleep problems should be carefully evaluated by a clinician, as unrecognized illnesses such as depression and anxiety disorders may be causing the sleep problem and treatment decisions need to take this into account.

**Guidelines for Use:** Ambien is available in 5 and 10 mg. tablets; tablets may be broken to get the correct dose. Ambien CR is available as 6.25 and 12.5 mg. tablets; these tablets should NOT be broken, chewed, or crushed. No generic form is available at present. The usual starting dose is 10 mg., taken just before bedtime, as Ambien works very quickly, especially if taken on an empty stomach. You should not take Ambien if you need to be fully alert less than 7 or 8 hours later.

**Precautions:** Do not take this drug if you have ever had an allergic reaction to Ambien. Inform your clinician if you have any known drug allergies; if you have kidney or liver disease; if you are taking any other drug (prescription or non-prescription), vitamin, supplement or herb; if you will be undergoing anesthesia or surgery. **Inform your clinician if you are or might be pregnant.** Ambien is not recommended for pregnant or nursing mothers. It has not been tested in children and is not recommended for use by infants or children. Metabolism of the drug may be slowed in elderly or debilitated people, so lower doses may be needed.

**This drug causes drowsiness, which may carry over into daytime.** Until you know how Ambien affects you the next day, use extreme caution in driving or operating dangerous equipment.

**NEVER drink alcohol while you are taking Ambien or any other sleep medicine.** Alcohol mixed with sleeping medicines can dangerously suppress key brain functions.

Withdrawal symptoms may occur if Ambien is stopped suddenly after daily use for more than a few weeks. Some people have only mild discomfort or uneasiness. In more severe cases, withdrawal symptoms may include abdominal and muscle cramps, vomiting, sweating, shakiness, and, rarely, seizures. Severe symptoms are uncommon, however. Another problem that may occur when sleep medicines are stopped is known as “rebound insomnia,” or increased difficulty sleeping for the first few nights after stopping the medicine. This problem usually self-correction in a few days. Consult with your clinician about how to stop sleeping medicines after regular use.

Overdoses of Ambien with other drugs that depress the central nervous system can be fatal. The major symptom of overdose is sedation, which may range from sleepiness to coma and unresponsiveness. **Immediate emergency medical care should be sought in cases of overdose with Ambien.**
Interactions:

Food: No restrictions.

Other drugs: There may be additive effects when Ambien is used with other medicines that can cause decreased alertness or coordination; this includes many medicines prescribed for depression and anxiety. Care should be taken when Ambien is used in combination with any of the following drugs: itraconazole (Sporanox), ketoconazole (Nizoral), fluconazole (Diflucan), and rifampin. Discuss with your clinician.

Side Effects of Ambien: Drowsiness, dizziness, difficulty with coordination.

Memory problems. Sleep medicines can cause amnesia, or the inability to remember what has happened for several hours after taking the medicine. This is not a problem if the person is asleep for that period of time, but it can cause problems for people who are traveling and then need to wake up before the effect of the medicine is gone.

Tolerance. When sleep medicines are used every night for more than a few weeks, they may lose their effectiveness. People are tempted to use a higher dose to get the same effect they once got with a lower dose – the hallmark of tolerance or habituation. Such dosage escalation can be dangerous, as higher doses may suppress vital centers in the brain. If your sleep problems persist beyond 1 to 2 weeks, discuss with your clinician.

Dependence. All people taking sleep medicines have some risk of becoming dependent on the medicine. Once dependence has developed, the body is not able to function normally without the medication and withdrawal symptoms may occur if it is stopped. The risk of dependence is greater in people who have been dependent on alcohol or other drugs. It is important to let your clinician know before starting a sleeping medicine if you have been addicted to drugs or alcohol.

Changes in behavior and thinking. Some people using Ambien and other sleep medicines experience unusual changes in behavior and thinking. These effects are not common, but may include more outgoing or aggressive behavior than normal, loss of personal identity, confusion, strange behavior, agitation, hallucinations, worsening of depression, or suicidal thoughts. If you or others notice any changes in your behavior, or if you have unusual or disturbing thoughts, call your clinician right away.