Nap Time For Toddlers Shouldn't Mean Supplements!

By Ruth Kava — March 9, 2018

Three teachers in a daycare center in a Chicago suburb have been arrested and charged with child endangerment and battery. Their crime? They gave 2- and 3-year olds gummie type supplements of melatonin to help them sleep at nap time. On the face of it this doesn’t seem like such a heinous act, but let’s unpack it a little and look at the underside.

The Parents

First of all, parents of these children knew nothing about this use of supplements for their kids. Maybe they wouldn’t have cared, and maybe they would have gone along with it. After all, these were legally sold and purchased over-the-counter supplements. And that might have been enough to soothe any concerns. But it shouldn’t.

The Real Problems

Were the doses in those OTC bottles for adults — not young children? ACSH’s Director of Medicine, pediatrician Dr. Jamie Wells, has pointed out that with some drugs you might get an effect opposite to that seen in adults when you give them to children. And even if that’s not the case with melatonin, it’s possible that the adult dose is just too much for a small child.

Even if the doses were supposedly for children, it’s unlikely that a careful clinical trial determined what the correct dose would be. In addition, even melatonin products supposedly designed for children indicate they’re for kids aged 4+. Not for 2 and 3-year olds.
The most serious issue is that these were dietary supplements. Anyone who has read ACSH’s publications (here [3], for example) on the topic knows that since 1994, with the passage of the Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act (DSHEA), there has been essentially no oversight of the quality of any such products. So, while the label may say XX mg melatonin, that may or may not be an accurate description of the doses in that bottle. Maybe it’s melatonin (a hormone that mammals make to help adjust their biological clocks), and only melatonin, but maybe there are contaminants too. We don’t know.

So what those daycare workers did was, at the least, a poorly thought out action. Whether it really rises (or sinks) to the level of crime remains to be determined by the legal system. But criminal or not, it should alert anyone responsible to the health of youngsters about the problems with dietary supplements — for adults as well as for children. You can read more about melatonin here. [4]