CBT-I Patient: Because my insomnia is triggered by high anxiety levels, my doctor many years ago advised me to take a sleep aid (melatonin and/or occasionally alprazolam) if I feel anxious and don't fall asleep within 20-30 minutes, even though it usually results in a hangover the next morning. What do you think of this strategy?

CBT-I Clinician: Intermittent use of a sleep aid no more than 3-4 times per week may be helpful. However, since prescription medications have many more side effects, they should have a short half-life and not disrupt sleep stages. Alprazolam has a long half-life of 12 hours, which means it takes 60 hours to fully eliminate it. Since that is almost three days, it should not be taken more than once every three days. It also disrupts deep sleep. A better choice in terms of half-life is Ambien or Sonata since they are eliminated daily and don't disturb deep sleep. However, they just got with a black box warning by the FDA about potential deadly side effects. The best choice, therefore, is an over the counter such as melatonin if CBT-I alone does not improve sleep significantly.