



American Council for Drug Education, an affiliate of Phoenix House
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BASIC FACTS ABOUT DRUGS: GHB and Rohypnol

What are GHB and Rohypnol?

GHB, or Gamma Hydroxy Butyrate, is a central nervous system depressant. Because very small amounts of GHB are found in the human body, GHB is often billed as a "natural" supplement, or as an anabolic steroid that helps build muscle mass (this claim was never proven). In actuality, GHB is made from a substance called GBL (which, when ingested, turns into GHB in the body and has the same effects). GBL is a solvent found in nail polish and floor cleaning products. BD (1,4 butanediol) also converts to GHB in the body. It is illegal to manufacture or distribute any of these three substances for human consumption.

Rohypnol is the brand name for flunitrazepam, and it is also a central nervous system depressant. It is in the same drug family as Valium, Halcyon, and Xanax, but is ten times as strong. Rohypnol is produced by Hoffman-LaRoche, Inc. in both Europe and Latin America as a sleep aid, but it is illegal in the United States.

What are the street names?

GHB is also known as "G," Georgia Home Boy, Gamma-OH, Liquid Ecstasy, Liquid E, Liquid X (GHB is not ecstasy), GBH or Grievous Bodily Harm (from the common misabbreviation), Organic Quaalude, Scoop

GBL and BD are often marketed under the names Blue Nitro, Thunder Nectar, Revivarant, Renewtrient, Revitalize Plus, SomatoPro, Invigorate, Firewater, and Verv

Rohypnol is also called roofies, roachies, rophies, roofenol, roche (pronounced roe-shay), La Rocha, rope, R-2, circles, Mexican valium, rib, and the Forget Pill

How are they taken?

GHB can be produced as a clear liquid (which has a salty taste but no smell), a white powder, or a tablet or capsule. It is most commonly used as a liquid - which is packaged in a small, clear, plastic bottle - and taken orally by the capful, but powder use is on the rise (which is typically dissolved into a beverage).

Rohypnol comes as a pill, in 1 and 2 milligram doses, that is taken orally, or dissolved in a liquid. The tablets are white and have a line across one side, and a number "1" or "2" inside a circle with the name "Roche" above it on the other. It is frequently used in combination with alcohol, and sometimes with other drugs such as marijuana, cocaine, and heroin (to either accentuate or help the user come down from the typical high of these drugs).

Both GHB and Rohypnol are inexpensive, which has made them increasingly popular at raves and with younger users.

Short-term effects

The effects of GHB and Rohypnol follow a similar pattern. The effects of Rohypnol begin within a half-hour, but don't peak for almost two hours. GHB takes effect within 10-20 minutes, but don't peak for almost an hour. The feeling the user gets from both drugs are the same - first they feel an intoxication similar to alcohol (the user feels relaxed, sociable, affectionate and playful, and disinhibited), followed by a feeling of drowsiness. Higher doses can lead to a sleep from which the user cannot be woken. The effects can last from 4-24 hours.

Special Issues Surrounding GHB and Rohypnol

Date Rape Drugs - Both GHB and Rohypnol have a reputation as date rape drugs, as they are being used to sexually assault women and men. How it happens - the drugs are easily slipped into someone's drink (GHB is usually a liquid, and Rohypnol dissolves quickly), and the person becomes either very open to suggestion and physically weak, or passes out entirely, leaving them vulnerable to the person who spiked their drink. Rohypnol is even more disturbing, because it causes people to black out - they have no memory the next day of what has happened to them. It's important never to accept a drink from someone that has already been opened, or to leave your drink unattended - even if it is just a soda or water. Hoffman-LaRoche has begun to take steps against this (but remember, any US use is illegal) by producing Rohypnol that turns a clear beverage blue (or a dark beverage cloudy), but the former version is still widely available and still an issue.

Overdose - Both GHB and Rohypnol present a serious overdose threat. Since they are depressants, both drugs can be fatal when mixed with alcohol (although an overdose of Rohypnol, on it's own, is not generally fatal). With GHB, another problem is the fact that it takes a while for the peak effects of the drug to take effect - people often take another dose thinking they haven't taken enough (and GHB *can* be fatal on it's own). GHB is also tricky because it is manufactured by individuals, and the strength can vary from batch to batch. Symptoms of overdose can include intense drowsiness, unconsciousness, or coma, muscle spasms, disorientation, vomiting, and slowed or stopped breathing (fatalities usually occur from respiratory failure).

Long-Term Effects

GHB - Right now, the long-term effects of GHB use are not known. However, since it is made from industrial chemicals, there is a risk of severe burns to the mouth, throat, and stomach from GHB that has been improperly produced.

Rohypnol - is both physically and psychologically addictive. Withdrawal symptoms peak 3-5 days after last use, and include extreme anxiety, muscle pain, headache, hallucinations, and seizures. Some withdrawal symptoms, including cardiovascular collapse, can be fatal.