

Primer: GHB, a Club Drug



GHB (gamma-hydroxybutyrate) is a fast-acting illegal drug. It's a depressant that slows down the central nervous system. It was once sold as a food supplement. But it is now known as a club drug. It's popular with teens who go to all-night dance parties (sometimes called raves).

GHB was first used as an anesthetic in the 1960s. Later it was sold in health food stores as a performance enhancer for bodybuilders. The FDA banned GHB in 1990. It is now a Schedule I controlled substance.

GHB produces a feeling of intense happiness (euphoria) and hallucinations. It's often made in secret labs with low-cost ingredients. It's often sold as a liquid by the dose (a capful from a bottle or drops). In some cities, GHB is put into water guns and users buy it by the squirt. In other instances, candy, such as a lollipop, is dipped in GHB and sold.

Among users, GHB has many names. They include:

- Liquid Ecstasy
- Grievous Bodily Harm
- Georgia Home Boy
- Liquid X
- Liquid E
- Soap
- Scoop
- Easy Lay
- Salty Water
- G-Riffick
- Cherry Meth
- Nature's Quaalude
- Zonked
- Organic Quaalude
- G
- Jib
- Woman's Viagra

GHB's effects on the body

GHB is addictive. It's hard to predict a person's reaction to it. The purity and strength of doses vary. In general, a user starts to feel the drug 15 to 30 minutes after taking it. Those feelings may last 3 to 6 hours.

GHB's high is similar to alcohol. Taking less than 1 gram makes a person feel relaxed and reduces inhibitions. At 1 to 2 grams, heart rate and breathing slow down. Balance and coordination are affected, too. GHB may also cause vomiting, high blood pressure, mood swings, violent behavior, and a feeling of spinning and dizziness (vertigo).

At higher doses, coordination and speech are strongly affected. The person may drift into a coma-like sleep. Its effects are stronger when taken with alcohol. Its withdrawal symptoms include sweating, trouble sleeping (insomnia), muscle cramping, shaking (tremors), and anxiety. Using GHB too much can also lead to breathing problems, tremors, and death. An overdose can happen in minutes.

GHB is considered a date-rape drug. It is odorless, colorless, and nearly tasteless, but it may have a slightly salty taste. But the taste can be changed with additives. It can be easily slipped into drinks. It can make a person feel less inhibited and increase sexual feelings. It can also cause memory loss (amnesia). A person who is not aware they were given GHB may not be able to resist a sexual assault. No tests are available to spot GHB use. So many GHB incidents go undetected.

Take action

A GHB overdose is an emergency. If you think you may have taken GHB, seek medical help right away. Some people may not seem to have bad reactions to GHB. But the drug can be fatal. Signs of an overdose include:

- Dizziness
- Lightheadedness
- Mental confusion
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Breathing problems
- Loss of consciousness

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