

# F-A-C-T-S ABOUT GHB, Rohypnol, Other Drugs, and Sexual Assault

## GHB, GBL, ROHYPNOL, ALCOHOL, OTHER DRUGS AND SEXUAL ASSAULT

Drugs of various types have been used in sexual assaults in the past, but the newest batch of rape drugs are even more dangerous and harder to detect than their predecessors. Any substance that confuses, incapacitates, or impairs the victim makes a sexual assault more likely. Stimulants, depressants, and hallucinogens can have those effects. However, the drugs most often implicated in sexual assault are depressants, with alcohol being the most common one.

Three newer drugs have received recent media attention regarding sexual assault — **Rohypnol** (flunitrazepam), **GHB** (gamma hydroxybutyrate), and **GBL** (which metabolizes to GHB in the body). These drugs are not new, but use of them has increased in the late 1990s. Concerns include several serious risks, including abuse of the drugs, risk of overdose injury or death, and their use in committing sexual assault.

These drugs are similar in many respects. They are used by some to cause an alcohol-like intoxication, which depends on the amount taken. They are also often used in combination with alcohol. They can cause negative effects such as nausea, respiratory distress, seizures, and coma. Fatal overdose is possible. Risk of death is greater if the drugs are used with other depressants, such as alcohol, but deaths have been reported due

to flunitrazepam or GHB alone. Their use can lead to dependence and withdrawal symptoms if use is stopped.

Flunitrazepam, GHB, and GBL have also been used, generally in combination with alcohol, to incapacitate a victim for purposes of committing sexual assault. Both drugs may be slipped into a victim's drink without his or her knowledge. The resulting intense intoxication and loss of consciousness (Rohypnol also causes loss of memory) make the assault both easier to commit and more difficult for the victim or law enforcement to prove.

## ROHYPNOL

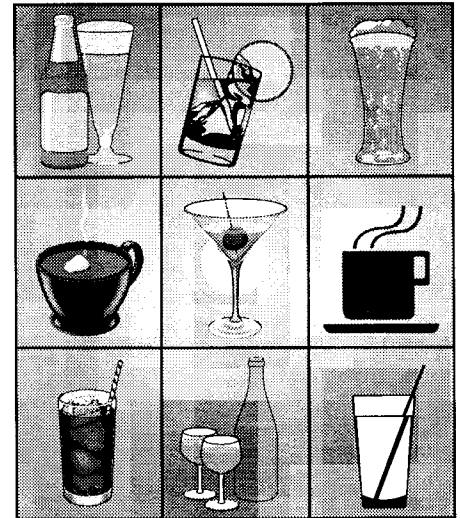
### *What is Rohypnol?*

Rohypnol is the trade name of flunitrazepam, a drug with sedative effects. It is available by prescription to treat insomnia or for certain psychiatric treatment in some foreign countries, or under very limited conditions in the United States. It is generally taken orally, but may also be smoked or snorted. It is sometimes taken with cocaine.

Common slang names for Rohypnol include Roofies, Rope, Forget Pill, Mexican Valium, Rib, Roachies, Wolfies and many variations of Ropies, Ruffles, etc.

### *What are the effects of Rohypnol?*

The drug has profound sedative effects, slowing reactions and coordination, causing amnesia, relaxing muscles, and causing sleep. Sedation lasts for up to eight hours.



### *What are the short-term risks of Rohypnol?*

Drowsiness, memory impairment, dizziness, and loss of coordination occur. These are increased greatly when alcohol is consumed at the same time. Impairment can lead to accidental injury and death.

Reactions such as restlessness, agitation, irritability, and aggressiveness can occur with this drug. In addition, rages, nightmares, and hallucinations can occur, although rarely. If used with another drug, especially alcohol, intoxication is greatly increased. Fatal overdose may occur if used with another depressant, such as alcohol. The drug can also prevent a user from realizing that they have been hurt.

In addition to its use as a sought-out drug of abuse, Rohypnol is given to others as a rape drug. When used in this way, the drug is often added to a person's drink without his or her knowledge, causing rapid loss of

inhibitions, grogginess, unconsciousness, and loss of memory. The effects make the person very vulnerable to rape. Reported cases have primarily involved female victims, but males have also been victimized in this way.

### *What are the longer-term risks of Rohypnol?*

Use of the drug can lead to physical and psychological dependence. The risk of this increases with larger doses and longer use. The risk of dependence is greater in those with a history of alcohol or other drug abuse.

Withdrawal symptoms from Rohypnol can include a feeling of skin crawling, sensitivity to sound and light, psychotic episodes, and seizures.

### *How common is Rohypnol use?*

Rohypnol is most common in southern states in the U.S., particularly along the border with Mexico where it is easily obtained. Use has spread since 1993. It is used by a wide range of groups, including gangs, teenagers, college students, and young adults outside college.

Research into the patterns of Rohypnol use in southern states found that although the specific drug Rohypnol was in use, the terms for Rohypnol had become a common descriptor used to refer to Rohypnol and a number of other drugs with similar appearance and effects. The reported spread and increase in Rohypnol use is thus likely exaggerated. However, the use of various drugs in rape or sexual assaults is apparently occurring more often, which is a serious concern.

## **GHB**

### *What is GHB?*

GHB stands for gamma hydroxybutyrate, or gamma hydroxybutyric acid. It is a central nervous system depressant. Small amounts occur naturally in the body, but the function of this naturally occurring level of the chemical is not clearly understood.

GHB is approved as an anesthetic in some countries. It was once marketed in the U.S. by mail order, primarily to body builders to supposedly stimulate muscle growth. It was banned by the FDA in 1990. It is not available in the United States except for research.

GHB is usually an odorless, clear liquid with a slightly salty taste. It is sometimes (but only rarely) found in powder form. The usual dosage is 1/4 teaspoon to 4 tablespoons. A soda pop capful is a common measured dose amount. GHB is usually taken in water or other liquids. It may also be snorted or smoked.

Most GHB available in the U.S. is produced in illegal labs. Strength and purity vary. Improper preparation can result in a toxic mixture of GHB and caustic chemicals.

Common slang names for GHB include G, Gamma-OH, Liquid E, Fantasy, Georgia Home Boy, Grievous Bodily Harm, Liquid X, Liquid Ecstasy, Scoop, Water, Everclear, Great Hormones at Bedtime, Blue Nitro, and Salty Water.

### *What are the effects of GHB?*

GHB produces an alcohol-like intoxication, including mood changes and euphoria. It is reportedly less likely to cause a hangover than alcohol. It increases the heart rate, causes visual disturbances, and dizziness. Some users report disorientation.

GHB also causes drowsiness, heavy sedation, and unconsciousness.

It can cause nausea and vomiting, seizures, and severe respiratory depression that can lead to coma and death.

The immediate effects usually begin in five to 20 minutes and last up to three hours. They may last longer, up to six or seven hours.

GHB effects and risks are increased if it is taken with alcohol, opiates, or other depressants.

In terms of potential lethality, GHB is not unlike crack cocaine. Given the variability in purity and concentration, one dose may be fatal. The same body builder who may be appalled at the suggestion of using cocaine may seek out GHB as a muscle growth stimulant. It is important to provide accurate information about GHB to those potentially most at risk.

### *What are the short-term risks of GHB?*

Visual disturbances, dizziness, disorientation, and unconsciousness make a person an easy victim for sexual or other assault.

These effects can also lead to injury or death.

Respiratory depression can lead to coma and death. There is no known antidote to GHB overdose. GHB has been linked to thousands of overdoses nationwide since 1990.

GHB that has been processed improperly can cause burns of the skin or internal burns.

### *What are the longer-term risks?*

Withdrawal symptoms can develop including sweating, insomnia, muscle cramps, tremors, and anxiety.

## How common is GHB use?

GHB use has increased since the early 1990s. From 1992 to 1996, emergency room visits in 21 U.S. cities showed an increase from 20 GHB-related episodes in 1992 to 629 episodes in 1996 (the most recent year for which statistics are available). Most of these were males between 18 and 25 who were admitted for GHB overdose.

## GBL

### What is GBL?

GBL stands for gamma butyrolactone. It is a liquid dietary supplement that has been available over the counter in the United States for a variety of uses. However, it has been found that this drug is changed in the body to GHB. Its effects and risks are therefore like those of GHB.

In January 1999 the U.S. Food and Drug Administration requested a recall of this drug by manufacturers because of its potential for abuse and risk of injury or death.

## ALCOHOL

Alcohol is a depressant drug found in beverages such as beer, wine, wine coolers, and distilled beverages — liquor. Alcohol depresses the central nervous system, causing progressive impairment. Depending on the amount taken, it causes reduced judgment, decreased inhibitions, disorientation, loss of coordination, and unconsciousness. It can cause coma and death.

Alcohol, used by the victim or perpetrator, is involved in 50 percent to 70 percent of sexual assaults. Alcohol is also a factor in many other assaults, unintentional injuries, and fatal overdoses. For more information on alcohol, see the alcohol fact sheets in this series.

## ACTIONS

*What can a person do to protect him or herself from these drugs, and from being a victim of rape or assault?*

- Don't accept intentional use of these drugs — they are dangerous.
- Watch your beverage at parties and social events. Do not leave it unattended.
- Don't accept a beverage from anyone you don't trust.
- Attend events with trusted friends. Watch out for them and have them watch out for you.
- If you drink alcohol, don't allow it to make you an easier victim.

*What should a person do who feels that he or she has been given GHB, GBL, or Rohypnol?*

- Obtain emergency medical assistance immediately. Call 911 or take the person to a hospital. It is not possible to know the strength of the dose taken. The drugs are potentially fatal.
- Bring the beverage that may have the drug in it with you. Ask to be tested (blood test and urine test) for these drugs right away, since tests may not be effective after 12 hours.
- If a person has been assaulted while incapacitated by Rohypnol, GHB, alcohol, or another drug, contact law enforcement officials immediately.

## NEW AND OLD

Rohypnol, GHB, and GBL are recent arrivals. Calling attention to the risks of these relatively new and less-familiar drugs can hopefully help people avoid the consequences of abuse and dependence on these drugs, as well as becoming victims of a rape or other assault. It can hopefully prevent overdose deaths.

Attention to the new drugs should not, however, distract people from the risks of sexual assault, of overdose, or of dependence caused by more familiar drugs, in particular alcohol. Alcohol is a much more frequent factor in these problems.

## LEGAL INFORMATION

Rohypnol and GHB are Schedule 1 controlled substances in Michigan. Use, possession, and delivery are illegal. Penalties include fines and imprisonment. GHB was added to the Schedule 1 drug list in 1998.

Sexual assault is a felony carrying penalties up to life in prison. It is also a federal offense to administer someone a controlled substance for sexual assault or other crimes of violence.

Giving someone a drug resulting in injury or death may be considered manslaughter or murder.

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