

GHB: THE FACTS

WHAT IS GHB?

Gamma hydroxybutyrate (GHB) and precursors (eg GBL gamma-Butyrolactone) are depressant drugs with sedative hypnotic effects, originally developed as pre-surgery anaesthetic. Depressants slow down the activity of the brain and other parts of the central nervous system. Street names include: Grievous Bodily Harm (GBH), *liquid ecstasy, liquid E, fantasy, blue nitro and liquid. GHB is an illicit substance.

*GHB is not related to ecstasy.

WHAT DOES GHB LOOK LIKE?

GHB exists in the form of a white or pale coloured powder or crystals but is often sold in a liquid form in small bottles or vials. Colorants are commonly used in production to distinguish the substance from water and other liquids. It is occasionally sold as a crystal powder. GHB may have a bitter or salty taste but when mixed in a beverage it is difficult to detect.

GHB RELATED EMERGENCY

If you can't wake someone up or you are concerned that they may have sustained a head injury from a drug related fall – call an ambulance immediately – **dial Triple Zero (000)**.

If the person has been mixing GHB with other drugs, tell the NSW Ambulance paramedic exactly what they have taken. Paramedics are there to help. Generally paramedics don't involve the police **unless** there is danger to themselves or other people/children, someone dies, or a crime (such as violence or theft) has been committed.

EFFECTS OF GHB

The effects of GHB appear to vary greatly according to the amount used. There is a small difference in the amount used to give an effect and the amount that can cause an overdose. One of the most risky aspects in using GHB is a small increase in amount can result in a dramatic increase in effect, i.e. overdose. A further risk is that there is often no way to be sure that the drug is manufactured correctly. Improperly made GHB may result in an extremely toxic mixture of GHB and the chemical sodium hydroxide.

What GHB does to you depends on:

- how much you take
- the type of GHB you take
- your height and weight
- your general health
- your mood
- your past experience with GHB
- whether you use GHB on its own or with alcohol or other depressant drugs
- whether you use alone or with others, at home or at a party, etc.

IMMEDIATE EFFECTS

When you have a small amount of GHB, the effects vary greatly from person to person and can last from a few minutes to a few hours. The effects become noticeable from 5 to 20 minutes after ingestion.

PHYSICAL EFFECTS

You may:

- feel good and confident
- feel excited or upset
- take more risks than usual
- have a heightened sense of touch
- want to have sex
- feel drowsy or sleepy

- feel dizzy
- get headaches
- suffer from tremors
- feel sick
- have diarrhoea or urinary incontinence
- find that your heart beats slower
- find that your body temperature lowers
- vomit
- get tunnel vision
- have blackouts and memory lapses
- have convulsions (fits)
- have a heart attack
- overdose
- go into a coma
- impair your capacity as a parent/primary carer of children.

PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS

You may:

- suffer memory lapses
- become uncoordinated (ataxia)
- become disorientated
- feel confused, irritated or agitated
- hallucinate.

LONG-TERM EFFECTS

Some long-term effects of GHB use are unclear. As GHB is similar to the effects of sedative drugs, it is possible to become physically and psychologically dependent on it (addicted). There is also the potential for tolerance to develop over a period of time to achieve the same (or any) effects as first experienced.

OVERDOSE

Not knowing the strength of GHB increases the risk of overdose. Overdose of GHB can happen to anyone. Even small amounts may cause overdose with some people who have an especially strong reaction to it.

When a person overdoses, they may:

- Appear to be asleep but cannot be woken.
- Be incoherent, sweating profusely, vomiting and have irregular or shallow breathing.

- Not be able to stand and/or have involuntary muscle contractions.

An overdose of GHB can cause:

- faster, irregular or weak heartbeat
- breathing problems
- heart attack
- coma
- death.

MIXING WITH OTHER DRUGS

Combining GHB with other depressant drugs like prescription medications or alcohol can slow down the body's central nervous system and be dangerous. The adverse effects of one drug may be greatly increased by the other.

It is increasingly common for GHB to be mixed with alcohol both inadvertently and by choice. Alcohol is particularly dangerous in combination with GHB as it can be difficult to control the dose.

Overdose is a significant risk in such situations.

WITHDRAWAL

GHB-dependent people may find it very hard to stop using or cut down because of withdrawal symptoms. Withdrawal from GHB may last two weeks or longer. These can include:

- confusion, agitation, anxiety, panic
- insomnia
- shaking
- muscle cramps
- perspiration
- hallucinations
- tachycardia (rapid heartbeat)
- seizures/convulsions (fits)
- delusions or paranoia
- psychosis
- sweats
- hypertension (high blood pressure)
- nausea or vomiting.

Sudden withdrawal from high doses may also result in bowel and bladder incontinence and blackouts, and may require medical assistance. If you are worried about withdrawal, contact your doctor or health centre.

SELF-HELP ASSOCIATIONS

na.org.au for **Narcotics Anonymous Australia**, a non profit fellowship or society of recovering addicts who meet regularly to help each other stay clean via a program of complete abstinence from all drugs.

TOLERANCE AND DEPENDENCE

There is evidence that GHB is highly addictive. People who use GHB regularly can develop a tolerance and dependence very quickly. Tolerance means that you must take more of the drug to feel the same effects you used to have with lower amounts. Dependence on GHB can be psychological, physical or both.

Dependence on GHB means that it takes up a lot of your thoughts, emotions and activities.

Dependence on GHB can lead to a variety of health, money, legal, work and relationship problems.

DRINK SPIKING

GHB has been used in drink spiking due to its dis-inhibiting and amnesiac effects that can put a person at risk of overdose, sexual assault, rape or theft.

If you think your drink has been spiked:

- ask someone you trust to get you to a safe place
- ask your doctor to test for the presence of drugs which can be identified through urine or blood tests within 24 hours.

If you feel unwell or suspect that you have been sexually assaulted then call an ambulance or go to the nearest NSW Health Sexual Assault service or Emergency Department.

Drink spiking is serious and illegal. To prevent drink spiking, it may be best to watch your drink, avoid sharing drinks, buy/pour your own drink and don't accept drinks from people you don't know well or trust.

PREGNANCY AND BREASTFEEDING

As is the case with many other drugs and medication, it is not recommended that people use GHB while pregnant or breastfeeding.

Many drugs can cross the mother's cord and therefore have some effects on the unborn child. In general, drug use during pregnancy can increase the incidence of babies born early, resulting in low birth-weight babies. Inform antenatal staff of GHB use and attend regular antenatal checkups.

If a mother continues to use GHB while breastfeeding, it is possible that the drug will be present in her milk and may have adverse effects on the baby. Babies are particularly susceptible to overdose.

It is generally risky to take any drug while breastfeeding without medical advice.

DRIVING UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF GHB

It is illegal to drive under the influence of drugs including GHB. Anyone under the influence of GHB who kills or injures another person while driving can be sentenced to a term in prison.

Driving under the influence of GHB is considered more dangerous than driving under the influence of alcohol.

THE LAW

If you possess, use, manufacture, import, sell or give GHB to someone else and get caught, you could face substantial fines and penalties including a prison sentence.

There have been instances where GHB has been used in drink spiking due to its dis-inhibiting and amnesiac effects.

INFORMATION AND ADVICE

Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS) NSW operates 24 hours, 7 days a week to provide education, information, referral, crisis counselling and support. Call (02) 9361 8000 (Sydney metro) or 1800 422 599 (outside Sydney metro and interstate) or visit www.yourroom.com.au

Your room provides drug and alcohol information and advice, campaigns and resources. Visit www.yourroom.com.au

Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council provides links to Aboriginal community controlled health services across NSW. Visit www.ahmrc.org.au for information about AHMRC members including a regional map, information and links to members websites.

Drug and Alcohol Multicultural Education Centre (DAMEC) provides services for people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Contact DAMEC on (02) 8113 1301 or for counselling and support services for CALD communities call (02) 8706 0150.

Drug Info provides facts and resources on alcohol and other drugs and the prevention of related harm. Visit www.druginfo.adf.org.au

State Library of New South Wales Drug Info provides up to date information on alcohol and other drugs in public libraries throughout NSW. Visit www.druginfo.sl.nsw.gov.au

eheadspace provides mental health and wellbeing support, information and services for young people (12 – 25 years) and their family and friends. Visit www.eheadspace.org.au

Family Drug Support provides 24-7 telephone support to families in crisis due to drug and alcohol issues. Call the Helpline on 1300 368 186 or visit www.fds.org.au

Kids Helpline is a free, 24 hour counselling service for young people aged 5 to 25 years. Counselling is offered via the Kids Helpline website www.kidshelp.com.au or email, or call 1800 55 1800.

Nepean Youth Drug and Alcohol Service (NYDAS) works within a holistic model of care to address a range of issues for young people (12 – 20 years of age) related to their alcohol and other drug use. Call (02) 4734 2129 or (02) 4734 1333.

NSW Users and AIDS Association (NUAA) is a peak drug user organisation in NSW providing harm reduction information and blood borne virus prevention peer education. Visit www.nuaa.org.au

Poisons Information Hotline is a 24/7 call centre service available across Australia. Call 13 11 26.

ReachOut is an Australian online youth mental health service with a mobile-friendly site and forums where you can access help, information and support. Visit au.reachout.com

Sexual Health Info Link provides free and confidential sexual health support and information. Visit www.shil.nsw.gov.au

Smart Recovery is a voluntary self-help group that assists people in recovering from alcohol, drug use and other addictive behaviours. Visit www.smartrecoveryaustralia.com.au

TAFE NSW provides help with education, career development or personal matters. Students can contact a local TAFE/university counsellor. Visit www.tafensw.edu.au

Youth Action is the peak organisation for young people in NSW. Visit www.youthaction.org.au and use the search option to access a directory of NSW youth services.

Youth Solutions provides services for young people 12 to 25 years of age and the community including prevention and health promotion, drug and alcohol education, community programs and information and referral. Visit www.youthsolutions.com.au or call (02) 4628 2319 [provides services to young people in Macarthur and Wingecarribee].

24 hour confidential telephone counselling services

NSW:
Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS)
Tel. (02) 9361 8000 *Toll free. 1800 422 599

VICTORIA: *Toll free. 1800 888 236

WESTERN AUSTRALIA:
Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS)
Tel. (08) 9442 5000 *Toll free. 1800 198 024

QUEENSLAND: :
Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS)
Tel. (07) 3837 5989 *Toll free. 1800 177 833

SOUTH AUSTRALIA:
Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS)
Tel. (08) 8363 8618 *Toll free. 1300 131 340

NORTHERN TERRITORY:
Amity Community Service
Tel. (08) 8944 6565 *Toll free. 1800 684 372
Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS)
*Toll free. 1800 131 350

TASMANIA:
Alcohol and Drug Information Service
*Toll free. 1800 811 994

ACT: Alcohol and Drug Program
Tel. (02) 6207 9977

*Toll free numbers are only available if you are calling from within that state.

NSW Health aims to reduce drug-related harm for individuals and the community by providing the facts, including the possible health, social and economic consequences of using alcohol and other drugs.

A suite of drug and alcohol fact sheets is available for download at: www.yourroom.com.au



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