

Substances At A Glance: GHB & Rohypnol

GHB & Rohypnol are CNS depressants, which are also referred to as drug-assisted assault drugs or date rape drugs due to their illegal use in sexual assaults.



What is Gamma-Hydroxybutyric Acid? Also known as GHB, this odorless and slightly sour or salty tasting substance is naturally found in the human body. It slows and calms the activity of the nervous system. Medically, it is used as a strong sedative. GHB is also produced illegally and has been used on victims in sexual assault cases, where victims who unknowingly take GHB fall unconscious.¹



What is Rohypnol? Commonly known as 'roofies,' Rohypnol is designed to slow or relax the central nervous system. Like GHB, Rohypnol may be used illegally by sexual predators to drug unknowing victims. This substance is banned entirely in Canada and the United States.



Why do people use GHB and Rohypnol? GHB was initially used by bodybuilders to stimulate muscle growth and to help with sleep as part of recovery from exercise. It has since become popular with partygoers, rave culture and recreational drug users. Rohypnol is sold in some countries as a sleeping pill but banned in both the US and Canada due to its strong sedative effects.



Short and long term effects of GHB/Rohypnol use: Use of these substances can have both significant physical and mental effects. The mental effects include relaxation, dizziness, euphoria and a lack of judgment or inhibition. Physical effects include slowed breathing, nausea, vomiting, drowsiness, loss of coordination, decreased blood pressure and heart rate and unconsciousness.¹



GHB, Rohypnol and the law: Both Rohypnol and GHB are Schedule I drugs in Canada, making possession, sale or production of each illegal. The exception for GHB is if a person is prescribed the substance by a doctor, while Rohypnol is altogether banned. Illegal use, possession, sale or production of either drug can result in significant fines and jail time;² spiking someone's drink with them can result in up to 14 years in prison.³



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There were 15,239 police-reported offenses involving illegal drugs like GHB and Rohypnol in 2021,⁴ including a bust in Alberta which resulted in the largest single seizure of GHB in provincial history (113.5 litres).⁵



What are the risks of using these substances? The risk of being sexually assaulted is a significant danger when GHB and Rohypnol are used. Other dangerous risks include overdose, which can happen suddenly with even small amounts of use of these substances. Symptoms include slowed or loss of breathing, cold body temperature, seizures and coma. Mixing these substances with alcohol, opioids or other drugs significantly increases the risk of fatality.¹



How can I talk with my kids about Roofies & GHB? Whether your teen goes to a party or on a trip with friends, it is important that they are aware of how these drugs are used and how they can protect themselves. While often associated with alcoholic beverages, they can also be slipped into a non-alcoholic drink, so it's important to remind your teen to always keep an eye on their drinks.



What important advice can I share with my teen? Do not drink anything that you did not see poured, open yourself or that someone else gave you. If you leave a drink unattended, dump it and get a fresh one. GHB & Roofies may have a slightly bitter taste, so if your drink starts to taste strange, dump it and move to a public space if you are not already in one. If you suspect you have been drugged, ask for help immediately from a friend or trusted person. If you suspect a friend has been drugged, stay with them and seek help immediately.



Mixing GHB with other drugs: GHB has become a popular drug with partygoers, especially those who are sexually active. However, it is very dangerous to mix GHB with other drugs, especially opioids, alcohol and sedatives like benzodiazepine. These drugs can cause significant impairment, blacking out, choking on vomit and an inability to call for medical help in case of overdose, greatly increasing the risk of death.¹

Reference List

1. Health Canada, 2023. [GHB](#).
2. Public Prosecution Services of Canada, 2020. [Mandatory Minimum Penalties for Particular Drug Offences under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act](#).
3. Alberta Legal, 2021. [Date Rape Drugs, Assault & Criminal Charges](#).
4. Statistics Canada, 2022. [Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics, Uniform Crime Reporting Survey](#).
5. CTV News, 2021. [Massive 'date rape drug' seizure in Calgary believed to be largest-ever in Alberta](#).