

GHB – get the facts

GHB (Gamma-Hydroxybutyrate or sodium oxybate) is categorized as a central nervous system depressant drug with effects related to dissociative anesthetics as well. GHB slows the central nervous system, especially breathing and affects heart rate and brain function. Impeding breathing is a primary concern, especially if taken with other depressant drugs (such as alcohol) or if taken by someone with breathing-related health issues. Its effects are highly unpredictable. Overdosing on GHB is a medical emergency. Unconsciousness and vomiting make a great risk for aspiration, which can result in death. Addiction to GHB is life endangering due to the effects of chronic use on the brain and a severe, potentially fatal withdrawal syndrome. Sadly few medical facilities worldwide are familiar with the treatment of GHB withdrawal syndrome. The actual detox period for GHB is 10 to 14 days, much longer than most drugs, and often requires a follow up rehabilitation program. It is not safe to attempt withdrawal “cold turkey” (without medical management) or home alone by self-administering other drugs or alcohol as a substitute.

This page offers information about GHB, including its effects, methods of administration, dosing, and attempts advice on how to stay safe. GHB is a highly regulated drug even where approved for medical use. With prescription use, the drug is uniquely to be taken only seated in bed or already lying down in bed due to its rapid and serious effects. Its effects are wide ranging with a steep dosage curve, meaning even a tiny increase in amount taken can result in a serious escalation of effects, including death from the drug itself or death from resulting behavior (such as falling or walking into traffic, etc.).

In Australia, GHB is often used within the dance and party scenes and in the bodybuilding scene as well, despite the high risks.

It is often referred to by nicknames including liquid ecstasy, fantasy, G, or grievous bodily harm.

GHB is a colourless, sometimes odourless, slightly oily liquid (depending on the actual substance consumed—see analog reference as 1,4 BD is slightly oily) that is clear to semi-opaque. It has a strong and distinctively chemical taste that is often described as salty-soapy or bitter. While it is not tasteless, it may be masked when mixed with other substances, thus surreptitious drugging is a serious issue related to accidental overdose, sexual assaults, robbery or kidnapping. GHB testing issues are complicated due to its rapid resolution from the human system and lack of rapid testing capabilities, making it difficult to capture when allegations of drugging are made. The effects of GHB limit or eliminate the victim’s ability to resist assault, protect themselves or adequately report events. Because GHB is a sexual stimulant for many people, it also results in effects witnessed or videotaped that confuse the issue of consent. This is a critical issue for both men and women as potential victims of predators.

GBL and 1,4BD are active analogs of GHB and are commonly sold in Australia as substitutes of GHB. When consumed they quickly convert to GHB in the body.

Any product given in a party scene as GHB involves no guarantee as to strength of the dosage or purity of GHB it contains. Pure GBL is stronger than converted (manufactured) GHB and effects can be felt faster, so this dramatically increases the chances of an accidental overdose. 1,4 BD is processed in a different pathway in the body to become GHB and can convert at a slower rate which

may cause the user to take more too soon, easily resulting in an overdose. Illicit drugs are often tainted with other substances or watered down to maximize profit, thus adding to the risks of dosing accuracy of such a highly unpredictable drug.

GHB recreational use commonly results in a highly intoxicated state, including vomiting, bizarre to violent behavior or unconscious periods. Users are typically unaware of the risk factors of their condition and may be ignored by others who are likely also doing drugs (risking their death from overdose) or ruining the evening of their friends who are worried about them and tied up attending to them or sitting in an ER waiting to see if they survive. GHB use has been described as “selfish” for that reason.