

# Police: Rohypnol and Gamma-hydroxybutyrate (GHB)

## ***Rohypnol***

Slang or Street Names: Roofies, Rophies, Roche, Forget-me Pill

Rohypnol® (flunitrazepam) belongs to the class of drugs known as benzodiazepines (such as Valium®, Halcion®, Xanax®, and Versed®). It is not approved for prescription use in the United States, although it is approved in Europe and is used in more than 60 countries as a treatment for insomnia, as a sedative, and as a presurgery anesthetic.

- Rohypnol is tasteless and odorless, and it dissolves easily in carbonated beverages. The sedative and toxic effects of Rohypnol are aggravated by concurrent use of alcohol. Even without alcohol, a dose of Rohypnol as small as 1 mg can impair a victim for 8 to 12 hours.
- Rohypnol is usually taken orally, although there are reports that it can be ground up and snorted.
- The drug can cause profound "anterograde amnesia"; that is, individuals may not remember events they experienced while under the effects of the drug. This may be why one of the street names for
- Rohypnol is "the forget-me pill" and it has been reportedly used in sexual assaults.
- Other adverse effects associated with Rohypnol include decreased blood pressure, drowsiness, visual disturbances, dizziness, confusion, gastrointestinal disturbances, and urinary retention.

Rohypnol, the trade name for flunitrazepam, has been a concern for the last few years because of its abuse as a "date rape" drug. People may unknowingly be given the drug which, when mixed with alcohol, can incapacitate a victim and prevent them from resisting sexual assault. Also, Rohypnol may be lethal when mixed with alcohol and/or other depressants.

Rohypnol produces sedative-hypnotic effects including muscle relaxation and amnesia; it can also produce physical and psychological dependence. In Miami, one of the first sites of Rohypnol abuse, poison control centers report an increase in withdrawal seizures among people addicted to Rohypnol.

Rohypnol is not approved for use in the United States and its importation is banned. Illicit use of Rohypnol began in Europe in the 1970s and started appearing in the United States in the early 1990s, where it became known as "rophies," "roofies," "roach," "rope," and the "date rape" drug.

Another very similar drug is now being sold as "roofies" in Miami, Minnesota, and Texas. This is clonazepam, marketed in the U.S. as Klonopin and in Mexico as Rivotril. It is sometimes abused to enhance the effects of heroin and other opiates. Based on emergency room admission information, Boston, San Francisco, Phoenix, and Seattle appear to have the highest use rates of Gamma-hydroxybutyrate (GHB)

clonazepam. Slang or Street Names: Grievous Bodily Harm, G, Liquid Ecstasy, Georgia Home Boy

GHB can be produced in clear liquid, white powder, tablet, and capsule forms, and it is often used in combination with alcohol, making it even more dangerous. GHB has been increasingly involved in poisonings, overdoses, "date rapes," and fatalities. The drug is used predominantly by adolescents and young adults, often when they attend nightclubs and raves. GHB is often manufactured in homes with recipes and ingredients found and purchased on the Internet.

- GHB is usually abused either for its intoxicating/sedative/euphoriant properties or for its growth hormone-releasing effects, which can build muscles.
- Some individuals are synthesizing GHB in home laboratories. Ingredients in GHB, gamma-butyrolactone (GBL) and 1,4-butanediol, can also be converted by the body into GHB. These ingredients are found in a number of dietary supplements available in health food stores and gymnasiums to induce sleep, build muscles, and enhance sexual performance.  
GHB is a central nervous system depressant that can relax or sedate the body. At higher doses it can slow breathing and heart rate to dangerous levels.
- GHB's intoxicating effects begin 10 to 20 minutes after the drug is taken. The effects typically last up to 4 hours, depending on the dosage. At lower doses, GHB can relieve anxiety and produce relaxation; however, as the dose increases, the sedative effects may result in sleep and eventual coma or death.
- Overdose of GHB can occur rather quickly, and the signs are similar to those of other sedatives: drowsiness,

- nausea, vomiting, headache, loss of consciousness, loss of reflexes, impaired breathing, and ultimately death.
- GHB is cleared from the body relatively quickly, so it is sometimes difficult to detect in emergency rooms and other treatment facilities.

Since about 1990, GHB (gamma- hydroxybutyrate) has been abused in the U.S. for euphoric, sedative, and anabolic (body building) effects. As with Rohypnol and clonazepam, GHB has been associated with sexual assault in cities throughout the country.

Reports from Detroit indicate liquid GHB is being used in nightclubs for effects similar to those of Rohypnol. It is also common in the club scene in Phoenix, Honolulu, and Texas, where it is known as "liquid ecstasy," "somatomax," "scoop," or "grievous bodily harm." In Miami, poison control center calls have reflected problems associated with increased GHB use, including loss of consciousness. In New York City, there have been reports of GHB use among those in the fashion industry. In Atlanta, it is commonly used as a synthetic steroid at fitness centers and gyms.

Coma and seizures can occur following abuse of GHB and, when combined with methamphetamine, there appears to be an increased risk of seizure. Combining use with other drugs such as alcohol can result in nausea and difficulty breathing. GHB may also produce withdrawal effects, including insomnia, anxiety, tremors, and sweating. Because of concern about Rohypnol, GHB, and other similarly abused sedative-hypnotics, Congress passed the "Drug-Induced Rape Prevention and Punishment Act of 1996" in October 1996. This legislation increased Federal penalties for use of any controlled substance to aid in sexual assault.

Information and educational materials on Rohypnol and GHB directed toward college students are available from the Rape Treatment Center at Santa Monica-UCLA Medical Center at 1-800-END-RAPE (1-800-363-7273). These materials are also being distributed by the U.S. Department of Justice to law enforcement agencies throughout the country.