

Drug Facts: GHB

A Library and Resource Center on Alcohol, Tobacco, Other Drugs, Mental Health and Wellness



Gamma-hydroxybutyric acid or GHB, is a compound that was initially used by body builders to stimulate muscle growth. In recent years it has become popular as a recreational drug among club kids and partygoers.

This "designer" drug is often used in combination with other drugs, such as Ecstasy. GHB is synthesized from a chemical used to clean electrical circuit boards, and is available in clear liquid, white powder, tablet and capsule form.

GHB is odorless and nearly tasteless. Users report that it induces a state of relaxation. The effects can be felt within 5 to 20 minutes after ingestion and the high can last up to four hours.

The Food and Drug Administration banned GHB in 1990 after 57 cases of GHB-induced illnesses (ranging from nausea and vomiting to respiratory problems, seizures and comas) were reported to poison control centers and emergency rooms. The drug was only permitted under the supervision of a physician. Since then, the drug has been implicated in several deaths and was subsequently added to the Schedule I list of drugs in the Controlled Substance Act. Anyone who possesses, manufactures or distributes GHB can face a prison term of up to 20 years.

GHB users risk many negative physical effects including:

- vomiting
- liver failure
- potentially fatal respiratory problems
- tremors and seizures, which can result in comas

GHB has reportedly been used in cases of date rape. Because GHB is odorless and tasteless, it can be slipped into someone's drink without detection.



Information provided by the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

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