



GHB (Gamma-HydroxyButyric acid)

G, GHB, one4b, liquid ecstasy, fantasy

GHB is a hypnotic sedative drug known by many people for its use in rape and sexual assaults. It generally comes either as a powder in a capsule or as a clear, salty liquid sold in small bottles mixed into water. In powder form, measuring a dose is fairly straightforward whereas with liquid it can be difficult to know the strength and there is no way, without testing, to determine its strength.

What GHB does

Although some people call it 'liquid E' its effects are more similar to alcohol than ecstasy. GHB affects the release of dopamine in the brain which at low doses usually causes effects ranging from relaxation to sleep.

The effects come on in about 15 minutes and usually last 1 - 3 hours though can last a lot longer depending on the dose and the individual. A hangover effect is often experienced for up to 72 hours afterwards.

Users describe the effects as similar to alcohol:	
• feel euphoric	• more sociable, less inhibited
At higher doses people experience an increase in the effects above and may also experience the following negative effects:	
• mildly relaxed, clumsiness	• feelings of emotional connection, oneness, relatedness
• heightened senses especially touch	• overly confident
• heightened libido increasing the risk of users engaging in unsafe sex	
• nausea and vomiting (especially when combined with alcohol)	• convulsions or twitching (especially when combined with stimulants)
• diarrhoea and urinary incontinence	• slurred speech, incoherence
• tremors	• dizziness
• depressed breathing; lack of air moving in and out of lungs	• agitation
• visual disturbances	• drowsiness
• non-responsive to/ don't feel pain	• amnesia, memory loss
• GHB reduces your body's ability to flush out alcohol (and other toxins). As a result alcohol (or other drugs) become concentrated in your liver and kidneys which can cause you to vomit, stop breathing, and lose consciousness - a lethal combination	• unconsciousness
• Deaths associated with GHB are sometimes due to the combining of GHB with other drugs especially alcohol and/or benzodiazepines	
• To date there has been little research into long-term effects of GHB on a user's health	



It is very easy to overdose on GHB making it potentially dangerous especially if used with alcohol

Some chemicals convert to GHB in the stomach and blood stream; these include GBL (gamma butyrolactone), 14B or One4b (1, 4, butanediol) and sodium oxybate which all have similar effects to GHB.

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Overdose and poisoning

GHB has many effects on the body which can make overdoses difficult to treat. Also GHB has a very fast overdose time course: within 15 minutes a person can lose consciousness and breathing can slow significantly. This can happen with doses above 3500 mg and single doses over 7000 mg can cause life-threatening respiratory depression (low air movement in and out of the lungs). Higher doses can cause the heart rate to slow (bradycardia) and stop working (cardiac arrest).

If someone experiences the following they may be overdosing:

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| • extreme nausea, dizziness, confusion and disorientation | • vomiting (see below for more info) |
| • agitation | • stiff muscles or muscle spasms |
| • fits, convulsions, seizures | • hallucinations, blurred vision |
| • extreme drowsiness, hard to wake them (sometimes characterized as a type of coma) for 1-4 hours | |

 If they become unconsciousness or stop breathing call an ambulance!

Many people are afraid to call an ambulance when someone ODs – but not doing so could see you in an even stickier situation. **ODs don't have to be fatal.** The difference between life and death often depends on the care given to the person who has overdosed. When you call the ambulance be as calm as possible, clear and concise:

- Tell the operator that someone has stopped breathing. That should get the ambulance there pretty quickly
- If you're asked if it's an overdose don't lie. If you're scared say you think the person took something but you don't know what. Be as honest as you can under the circumstances



The greatest life threat due to GHB overdose is that someone stops breathing. Other relatively common causes of death when someone's taken GHB include:

- choking on vomit. People are most likely to vomit as they become unconscious and as they wake up. Keep the person awake and moving. Never leave them on their own. They may be in a good mood but this does not mean they are not in danger. **GHB overdose is a medical emergency**
- trauma sustained while intoxicated (e.g. having an accident while driving under the influence of GHB)
- positional asphyxia (when the position of a person's body interferes with their ability to breath)

Tolerance and dependence

People can become both physically and psychologically addicted to GHB. They experience symptoms of withdrawal if they suddenly stop using GHB. They can't sleep, feel anxious, get tremors and sweaty and their heartbeat is irregular. Withdrawal can be severe and medical assistance may be needed. According to the NZ Drug Foundation many heavy users say they were able to taper off their use to zero by reducing their intake slowly over a two week period.

Withdrawal effects may include hallucinations, insomnia, anxiety, tremors, sweating, edginess, chest pains and tightness, muscle and bone aches, sensitivity to sounds and colours, and mental blocks. The effects can last 2-21 days and some people might experience bowel or bladder incontinence and blackouts. Anyone experiencing these symptoms should see a doctor.

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Harm reduction

- No use is the safest choice
- Avoid mixing GHB with alcohol or other drugs
- Measure the amount you are taking accurately. Remember the effects of this drug vary a lot from one person to the next; you may not be able to tolerate what someone else can. Be aware that GHB concentration can vary a lot between batches
- Avoid GHB if you have heart or breathing problems, epilepsy, sensitivity to other central nervous system depressants or general poor health
- Avoid using with drugs that also have a sedative effect (e.g. benzos, opiates, alcohol or ketamine)
- Taking GHB is safest with friends who have had previous experience with the drug and know what you're using in case medical attention is urgently required. Avoid taking it alone
- If purchasing G, check if it's GHB or GBL as GBL is usually 2 to 3 times stronger. However individual batches of these drugs will also vary so be cautious if acquiring G from new sources
- Avoid accepting GHB or similar drugs from people you don't fully trust due to the possible risk of rape, robbery or being left alone if you're too out of it or unconscious.

Looking for help?

It is dangerous to suddenly stop taking GHB if you have been taking it daily for a period of time. Seek advice from your GP or come to the walk in clinic at Pitman House between 10am and 1pm Mon-Fri for advice or an assessment

If you're looking for more information, or maybe want to talk to someone about GHB or other drug issues for yourself or someone close to you give Auckland CADS a call on 845-1818

For confidential advice, support or information on alcohol & drug services in your region contact the alcohol drug helpline on 0800-787-797

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