

Fact Sheet

GHB

What is GHB?

GHB (gamma hydroxybutyrate) is a depressant drug. Depressant drugs do not necessarily make you feel depressed. Rather, they slow down the activity of the central nervous system and the messages going between the brain and the body.

Other common names

GHB is also known as G, fantasy, grievous bodily harm or GBH, liquid ecstasy, liquid E, liquid X, salty water, Georgia Home Boy, soap, scoop, cherry meth, blue nitro and Vitamin G.

What does it look like?

GHB commonly comes as a colourless, odourless, bitter or salty tasting liquid, usually sold in small bottles or vials. It also comes as a bright blue liquid ('blue nitro') and less commonly as a crystal powder.

Effects of GHB

The effects of any drug vary from person to person. How GHB affects a person depends on many things including their size, weight and health, whether they are accustomed to taking the drug, whether other drugs are present in their body, and the amount taken.

There is no safe level of drug use. Use of any drug always carries some risk – even prescribed medications can produce unwanted side effects.

Low to moderate doses

The effects of GHB may be felt 15 to 20 minutes after it's taken and will last for approximately three to four hours.

Some of the effects may include:

- > feelings of euphoria
- > increased sex drive
- > lowered inhibitions
- > memory lapses
- > drowsiness
- > clumsiness.

Higher doses

It is very easy to take too much GHB because it is a very concentrated liquid. If GHB is taken with other depressant drugs such as benzodiazepines or alcohol, the chances of overdosing are increased.

Large amounts of GHB or a strong batch may produce the following effects:

- > vomiting
- > sweating
- > irregular or shallow breathing
- > confusion, irritation and agitation
- > hallucinations
- > blackouts and memory loss
- > unconsciousness that can last for three to four hours
- > seizures and death.

Long-term effects

Little is known about the long-term effects of GHB use. However, it is known that regular use can lead to tolerance and dependence.

Taking GHB with other drugs

The effects of mixing GHB with other drugs, including alcohol, prescription medications and over-the-counter medicines, are often unpredictable.

If GHB is taken with other depressant drugs such as alcohol or benzodiazepines, the chance of overdose is greatly increased.

Using GHB to help with the symptoms of the 'comedown' from using stimulants can lead to a cycle of dependence of both drugs.

Pregnancy and breast feeding

GHB can be passed on to an unborn baby through the placenta, or to an infant in breast milk. This could harm the baby and increase the chances of going into labour early.

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Driving

The effects of GHB, such as drowsiness and dizziness, can affect driving ability. It is common not to notice that driving ability is affected until a situation arises where a quick and accurate response is necessary to avoid an accident.

Effects on work

Under occupational health and safety legislation, all employees have a responsibility to make sure they look after their own and their co-workers safety. The effects of GHB such as sleepiness and dizziness can affect a person's ability to work safely and effectively.

Tolerance and dependence

There is evidence that after prolonged use GHB can lead to dependence. People who are dependent on GHB find they crave the drug and it becomes far more important than other activities in their life.

Dependence on GHB can be psychological, physical or both. People who are psychologically dependent on GHB may feel an urge to use it when they are in specific surroundings or socialising with friends. Physical dependence occurs when a person's body adapts to GHB and gets used to functioning with the GHB present.

Withdrawal

If a dependent person stops taking GHB, they may experience withdrawal symptoms. People may experience withdrawal symptoms about 12 hours after the last dose, which can continue for about 15 days.

Withdrawal symptoms may include:

- > confusion, anxiety and paranoia
- > feelings of doom
- > restless sleep
- > muscle cramps and tremors
- > hallucinations
- > rapid heartbeat.

Sudden withdrawal from high doses can also result in bowel and bladder incontinence, and blackouts. Medical assistance should be sought when withdrawing from GHB.

Getting help

If your use of GHB is affecting your health, family, relationships, work, school or other life situation, you should seek help.

A good place to start is with your local doctor who is likely to know your medical history. Your doctor can give you information, a referral to a treatment service and ongoing treatment after specialist treatment is completed.

Another option is self-referral. Many specialist treatment services allow this and you can contact them directly.

Further information

The DrugInfo website (www.druginfo.adf.org.au) has information on:

- > support services in your state or territory
- > treatment options
- > free resources on GHB.

The Australian Drug Information Network website (www.adin.com.au) has further information about self-referral treatment services.



druginfo.adf.org.au



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