

frequently asked questions



GHB & GBL

What are GHB and GBL?

GHB is short for Gamma-hydroxybutyrate and is one of the strangest drugs you are likely to encounter. It is most accurately described as a 'nutrient'. It is used medically in some countries as a mild anaesthetic and because of its muscle relaxant effects to aid in childbirth. It is used by other people to help sleep, to stimulate muscle growth, as an antidepressant and has been used to aid in alcohol and opiate withdrawal. It has been reported to have been used as a 'date rape' drug. Its main use though, is as a recreational drug for its euphoric effects.

GHB is a synthetically produced drug that is very similar to a naturally occurring chemical Gamma Amino Butyric Acid or GABA for short. GABA seems to act with chemicals in the brain, in particular dopamine, though its exact function is still unclear. GHB was first synthesised 30 years ago by a French scientist Dr Laborit who wanted to explore the effects of GABA in the brain, but on discovering GHB became something of a convert spending the rest of his life researching and using GHB. GHB was made a class C drug within the Misuse of Drugs Act in 2003.

GBL (gamma butyrolactone) is widely used as an industrial solvent and was used as a legal substitute for GHB (a 'legal high') until December 2009 when it, and a similar drug 1,4-BD became class C drugs like GHB. GBL and 1,4-BD are pro-drugs of GHB, meaning they convert to GHB in the body. **GBL and 1,4-BD have almost identical effects and risks to GHB so for the rest of this booklet we will simply refer to GHB.**

What GHB is not

GHB is not liquid ecstasy. It is not chemically related to ecstasy or amphetamine or LSD. Its effect at low doses can seem 'ecstasy like' to some people. This together with the fact that "Liquid E" seemed a good marketing ploy, led to it being 'branded' in this way by dealers, when it first appeared on the London gay scene in the mid 1990s.

What does it look like?

GHB usually appears as a clear slightly oily liquid. GHB has an unpleasant chemical taste, so is usually mixed with orange juice, water or milk. It is usually swallowed as a liquid. It is bought in little phials or purchased by the cap or in larger bottles.

What are the effects of GHB?

All drug effects depend on the mood you're in when you take the drug, where you are, who you're with and the amount taken. GHB is a drug that can have a wide variety of effects depending on the dose you take. Getting the desired dose is the major problem and will be dealt with later.

At low doses, the effects start between 10 and 30 minutes after taking it. The effects include mild euphoria a sense of warmth and well being, increased confidence and a loss of inhibitions with an alcoholic like drowsiness. There is a tendency to 'verbalise' (talk a load of shite). The effects usually last between 1½ to 3 hours. Some people say they wake the next morning feeling refreshed without the hangover associated with alcohol.

Quite small increases in the dose can lead to dramatic intensification of the effects; giddiness and general silliness, slurring of speech, dizziness, loss of co-ordination and vomiting. At high doses GHB will induce sleep or literally ‘knock you out’. You will probably be in a deep ‘unrousable’ sleep for 3 to 5 hours and if you have taken it whilst you are out you will probably wake up in casualty, surrounded by worried friends, pissed off medical staff and an interested police officer.

What are the dangers of GHB?

There is no such thing as a completely safe drug whether it’s prescribed by your doctor or bought from a dealer. The real question is what is the likelihood of damage or death from GHB and this is a difficult question to answer. GHB is a very ‘dose dependent’ drug. Up until its ban in America (laws vary from state to state) the medical evidence seemed to show it was a relatively safe drug if used ‘correctly’. The problem is getting a ‘correct’ or ‘safe’ dose. There is no real way of knowing the concentration of any liquid you buy. On top of this, if badly made, GHB can result in a mix of GHB and sodium hydroxide, which can cause caustic burning of the mouth.

Since its ban in America the arguments seemed to have become polarised between those who maintain it will do nothing more than put you to sleep if you overdose to those who claim it is toxic, can cause a wide range of side effects and can kill.

Everybody agrees that GHB is most dangerous if either taken in high doses or mixed with alcohol. At a high dose it can lead to unconsciousness and vomiting. This is a common cause of death with any drug including alcohol. When you lose control (with any drug) you are prone to accidents.

Since we first wrote this booklet in the 1990s there have been widespread reports of problems with GHB. These in the main involved coma (deep unconsciousness) and respiratory depression (severe breathing problems).

In short whilst GHB can be and has been used by thousands of people without their coming to any harm, it is all too easy to overdose, especially when mixed with alcohol. Overdose will almost certainly lead to unconsciousness and may well involve breathing difficulties and possible heart problems. **It can and has killed people who use it.**

What are the side effects?

Many of the reported side effects are similar to alcohol and have been mentioned above. You certainly shouldn't attempt to drive a car whilst under the influence. Other side effects that have been reported include slowing of the heart rate, a change in blood pressure, muscle contractions or seizures. It should therefore be avoided by anybody known to suffer from heart complaints, low or high blood pressure, eclampsia (convulsions) or epilepsy.

Diarrhoea and loss of bladder control, temporary amnesia and sleep walking have also been reported. Some people think that GHB lowers potassium levels and recommend taking potassium supplements with GHB.

How does GHB react with other drugs?

GHB is claimed to be 'synergistic'. This means that it adds to the effects of other drugs so that the combination of the two can be more powerful than the effects of either i.e. $1 + 1 = 3$. It has been used with stimulant drugs like ecstasy and cocaine in an attempt to enhance the effects. However whilst it may enhance the desirable effects of other drugs, it will also increase the side effects. This is particularly dangerous with drugs such as heroin as it may enhance the effects of respiratory depression.

Avoid sleeping pills (such as Valium), ketamine and even over the counter night time cold treatments that induce sleep. Drugs that depress the central nervous system such as barbiturates or alcohol should not be used. GHB reacts very badly with alcohol and the mix of the two should be avoided at all costs. GHB can also reduce the efficiency of some HIV medication.

What is a safe dose?

GHB is a very 'dose specific' drug, therefore dosage is of vital importance. Dosage is different for different people and depends among other things on body weight. We do not recommend GHB use and can't guarantee a 'safe dose'. Having said that it is important if you do use it, not to overdose. Drinking a pint of beer would be less risky than drinking 15 pints. The problem with GHB is that the margin of error is much smaller and unlike alcohol you have no real way of knowing the strength.

Start with a small dose: (half a cap full). Make sure you have an empty stomach and are alcohol free. The effects should have started after 15 minutes and last a couple of hours. Wait at least half an hour. If there is no effect take an even smaller amount and wait another half an hour.

If you are finding desired pleasant effects, don't be greedy and think that taking more will give you more of the same. It will just lead to you being 'knocked out' and vomiting. If you find that the desired dose is higher than the first dose you took, don't take a bigger dose the next time you use, build it up in the same way.

Is GHB addictive?

We now know that for some users GHB can be highly addictive. We have spoken to a number of people who have reported using the drug compulsively around the clock, sometimes every 2 to 4 hours and report a severe and prolonged withdrawal when they stop using.

Withdrawal from GHB is like the severe withdrawal that some people addicted to alcohol experience and **can be fatal**. If you have trouble stopping, seek advice from your doctor or local drug service. Stopping suddenly for those highly addicted can lead to withdrawal symptoms 1 to 6 hours after the last dose. They vary in severity but can include hallucinations, paranoia and other psychotic symptoms, rapid heart beat (tachycardia) and high blood pressure (hypertension).

If you think you have or think you are likely to experience GHB withdrawal **you should NOT stop taking the drug suddenly**. Contact your doctor or local drug service who can arrange for a medically supervised withdrawal for you.

Does GHB promote muscle growth?

GHB was used by bodybuilders, both to aid sleep and because it was thought to stimulate growth hormone release, though nobody knows exactly how this works.

The supply of GHB by bodybuilders working as door staff at pubs and clubs was thought to have been a major factor in its growth as a recreational drug. Its use by bodybuilders in the UK was fairly common in the 1980s and 1990s, however, it is much rarer these days.

Does GHB help with insomnia?

GHB has been used medically in cases of chronic sleeping disorders. It is certainly effective in putting people to sleep though it is often reported that this lasts only 3 to 4 hours, before people suddenly wake.

Is GHB an antidepressant?

GHB is not medically licensed or approved as an antidepressant, so claims to its effectiveness cannot be proved or checked. However quite startling claims are made by some regular users as to its long term effect as an antidepressant. Unlike other antidepressants like Prozac or Seroxat the effects (so it is claimed) don't need to be built up, they start within half an hour.

The effects are described as not cutting off the dips (highs and lows) of mood, more 'letting it all out'. A sense of well being, increase in confidence, ability to communicate easily and unblocking of feelings are reported even after the use of the drug has stopped.

Does GHB improve sex?

GHB is also claimed to be an aphrodisiac, even by its inventor Dr Laborit. Its effects are also claimed to involve disinhibition, heightened sense of touch (a bit like the qualities of ecstasy), enhanced “male erectile capacity” (hours, like a stick of Blackpool rock) and an increased intensity of orgasm, particularly in women. GHB can certainly make you horny and lower your inhibitions, so make sure you still carry condoms and practice safer sex.

Is GHB a ‘date rape’ drug?

Along with Rohypnol and other drugs, GHB is a drug that has been associated with ‘date rape’ in America and more recently through the scare stories fed to the British press. Much of the media reporting of this has been exaggerated, but having said that, any drug, including alcohol, that leads to a loss of control can make people vulnerable and if you are unconscious in the company of strangers anything can happen. If you are going to use GHB when not in the comfort of your home, make sure there is somebody with you who you trust who can look after you if you get into trouble. Spiking somebody’s drink with GHB has the potential to kill them.

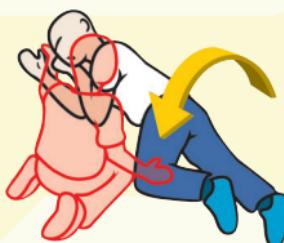
Is GHB legal?

GHB, GBL and 1,4-BD are all controlled drugs. GHB was made a class C in the Misuse of Drugs Act in 2003 and GBL and 1,4-BD in 2009, so possession is an offence as is supplying (giving away or selling) to anybody else. It is also illegal to import the drug from a country where it is still legal or make it. It is relatively easy to make and extremely easy to make badly. There are various sites on the internet that will provide you with the recipe, but, be warned, the internet contains good and bad information. In America badly mixed GHB has resulted in people admitted to hospital with burnt mouths and windpipes.

How can I avoid the risks?

There is no completely safe way of taking GHB and there are no sure fire ways to avoid the risks, but here are some tips that may help you.

- **Don't take too much. Never swig from a bottle.** Start with a small dose (half a cap full). Wait at least half an hour, ideally 2 hours before taking more. Taking more will not enhance the desired effects, but will bring on the nasty stuff.
- **Do not drink alcohol or mix with any of the other drugs mentioned.**
- **Don't take it on your own.** Have somebody with you who you trust (who hasn't also taken GHB), in case you lose control or pass out. It is always better to take a drug in a familiar place, where you feel safe.
- **If somebody is unconscious, make sure they are lying on their side so they don't choke on their own vomit.** If they can't be roused (even if you think they are just sleeping) call an ambulance. Epileptics, those with heart problems, abnormal blood pressure, asthma or any breathing problems or any of the conditions mentioned are more at risk.



The recovery position

We now know that GHB and GBL can be highly addictive if taken on a regular basis. Withdrawal can be severe and prolonged (last for weeks) and can be fatal. It is therefore highly advisable for regular users who have trouble stopping to seek advice from your doctor or local drug service **BEFORE** you stop using.

- [>]** aims
To provide information on the nature and effects of GHB and GBL and reduce the risk of overdose and the dangers associated with mixing drugs.
- [>]** audience
Adults and young people engaged in recreational drug use. Use with under 16s with support.
- [v]** content
Some swearing.
- [£]** funding
Self-financed.



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At the time of writing GHB and GBL are class C drug under the Misuse of Drugs Act
– search for R10 on the Exchange Supplies website for version information, and updates.