

GHB

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW



Australian Government
Department of Health

WHAT IS GHB?

GHB is short for gamma-hydroxybutyrate and is naturally produced in small amounts by the body.¹ It's a depressant drug, which means that it slows down the central nervous system (it does not necessarily make a person feel depressed).

It is sometimes used as a date rape drug.² Problems with safety, including concerns about its use in date rape, have led to it being banned in several countries including Australia where sale and possession is illegal.

GHB is commonly sold as a clear or blue liquid,³ usually in a little vial such as a fish-shaped sushi soy sauce container and is normally taken orally (swallowed).³ It is sometimes colourless and often odourless making it hard to taste or smell when mixed with alcohol. Sometimes other related substances called GBL and 1,4B are contained in or sold as GHB, but may be more potent, toxic and more likely to cause overdose.⁴

Other names for GHB include: Fantasy, grievous bodily harm, GBH, G and Gina. GHB is sometimes referred to as liquid ecstasy or liquid E but it is not related to MDMA at all.

HOW MANY PEOPLE USE GHB?

According to the 2016 National Drug Strategy Household Survey, one in every one thousand (0.1%) Australians (aged 14 or over) reported having used GHB in the past 12 months.

WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS?

Once swallowed, GHB takes around 15–30 minutes to take effect and last around half an hour.^{6, 7} GHB can have the following effects:^{1, 6, 8}

- **Drowsiness**
- **Feeling relaxed**
- **Friendliness or sociability**
- **Increased sex drive**
- **Euphoria or a 'high'**
- **Hot/cold flushes**

GHB does not usually have a 'comedown' or 'crash' phase. However, there are several harmful effects and problems that it can have; these are described below.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

GHB can have a number of harmful effects, including:^{1, 8}

- **Drowsiness, passing out, blackouts or memory loss**
- **Heavy sweating**
- **Dizziness**
- **Impaired movement and speech**
- **Confusion and agitation**
- **Heart palpitations, chest pains (these can be signs of more serious problems)**
- **Some users take greater risks with sex while under the influence, such as not using a condom, which increases the risk of catching sexually transmitted infections (STIs) or unintended pregnancy**
- **Headaches**
- **Tremors or shaking**
- **Nausea and vomiting (this can last for several hours)**
- **Blurred vision**
- **Difficulty breathing**
- **Fits or seizures**
- **Coma**
- **Overdose (see below for more information)**

GHB has been identified as a 'date-rape drug' because it is easy to hide in drinks and can **cause amnesia (memory loss), impaired movement and speech**. However, while GHB may be used for this purpose, evidence suggests that alcohol, rather than GHB, is the drug identified in most cases of date rape.⁹

Whether a person is a first-time, occasional or regular user, one of the major risks is that the effects of illegal drugs are unpredictable, and users can never be sure what they're taking.

GHB AND OVERDOSE

There is an extreme risk of overdose with GHB. This is because there is very little difference between the amount required for the 'high' and the amount required to overdose.¹⁰ The risk is higher if it's stronger than expected or if it's used at the same time as other depressant drugs (e.g. alcohol, opioids, heroin, and benzodiazepines such as Valium or Xanax). Users should also be aware that the drug strength and contents vary.

The risk of overdose also varies from one person to another based on a number of factors including:

- **Physical size**
- **Age**
- **Gender**
- **Physical health**

IS GHB ADDICTIVE?

While it doesn't seem to be very common, some people do become dependent on (addicted to) GHB.¹



FOR MORE INFORMATION

We have listed some of the national telephone helplines and websites below.

Australian Drug Foundation

Provides information about drugs and links to services in each state and territory
www.adf.org.au

DrugInfo Line

Provides information about drugs and alcohol. Open 9am–5pm, Monday to Friday
1300 85 85 84 or **03 8672 5983**. Or visit www.druginfo.adf.org.au

Just Ask Us

Provides information about drugs, alcohol, health and well-being
www.justaskus.org.au

Kids Helpline

Free, private and confidential telephone and online counselling service for young people aged 5–25 years
Open 24 Hours **1800 55 1800**

Lifeline

24 hour crisis line **131114**
Also available is one-on-one chatlines for crisis support, visit
www.lifeline.org.au/Find-Help/Online-Services/crisis-chat

Counselling Online

Free, confidential counselling service for people using drugs, their families and friends
www.counsellingonline.org.au

National Drugs Campaign

Australian Government website provides information about illicit drugs and campaign resources.
www.australia.gov.au/drugs

Family Drug Support

For families and friends of people who use drugs or alcohol
1300 368 186

Some state and territory based helplines are listed below.

Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS)(free, confidential advice about drugs and alcohol).
Some services operate 24 hours.

| State/Territory | City contact | Regional/Rural contact (free call from landline) |
|--|---|---|
| New South Wales ADIS | 02 9361 8000 | 1800 422 599 |
| Queensland ADIS | 1800 177 833 | 1800 177 833 |
| Victoria Directline | 1800 888 236 | 1800 888 236 |
| Western Australia ADIS | 08 9442 5000 08 9442 5050 (for parents) | 1800 198 024 1800 653 203 |
| Australian Capital Territory Alcohol & Drug Program | 02 6207 9977 | |
| Northern Territory Alcohol & Other Drug Services | 08 8922 8399 (Darwin) 08 8951 7580 (Alice Springs) | 1800 131 350 |
| Tasmania ADIS | 1800 811 994 | 1800 811 994 |
| South Australia ADIS | 1300 131 340 | 1300 131 340 |

Callers in Victoria can also contact the Youth Substance Abuse Service (YSAS) on 1800 014 446
(24 hour toll free service)

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