

GHB

What is GHB?

GHB is short for gamma-hydroxybutyrate which is a central nervous system depressant. Although it is sometimes called liquid ecstasy it is not chemically related to ecstasy and has an entirely separate chemical profile and effects.

GHB is a naturally-occurring substance found in the body. It was first synthesised in the 1960s and developed as an anaesthetic, and has been used as a treatment for a number of medical conditions, including insomnia, depression, narcolepsy and alcoholism. It has also been used by bodybuilders and athletes for its ability to stimulate growth hormone levels. More recently, it has been associated with the nightclub and rave scenes.

GHB usually comes as a liquid, and is sold in vials, bottles or fish-shaped soy sauce containers. It is colourless, but may have colour added (often blue) to stop it being mistaken for water or other clear liquids. It is odourless, and can have either a bitter or a salty taste. Less often, GHB is found in the form of a white powder. Other names for GHB include: fantasy, grievous bodily harm, GBH, G, liquid e, liquid x, blue nitro.



How many people use GHB?

According to the 2013 [National Drug Strategy Household Survey](#), fewer than 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?

The short-term effects of GHB include:

- feelings of euphoria and increased well-being
- increased libido
- drowsiness
- nausea and vomiting
- visual disturbances
- agitation and dizziness
- incoordination
- respiratory depression and distress

Initial effects occur 15-20 minutes after oral administration, with peak effects occurring 30-60 minutes post-ingestion. The effects of GHB can last from 1.5 up to 3 hours, or even longer if large doses have been consumed.

What are the risks?

Little is known about the long-term effects of GHB due to the short time it has been used as a recreational drug. However, of particular concern is the combination of GHB with other drugs, especially other depressants, such as alcohol or benzodiazepine. The combination of these drugs increases the depressant effects of both drugs, which may lead to respiratory distress and even death.

GHB and overdose

Overdosing is a serious danger with GHB. The difference between a dose that produces the desired effects and a dose that produces dangerous effects is very small.

Serious adverse effects can include sudden sedation and respiratory distress. Analysis of different vials of GHB has shown that the concentration varies considerably, so users can never be sure of how much they are taking.