

# fast facts

## rohypnol

■ **Overview:** Mention the drug Rohypnol anywhere in the United States, and a single phrase comes to mind: **date-rape drug**. That association burned itself deeply into our collective psyche in recent years after multiple incidents of sexual assault were linked to the drug, a fast-acting sleeping pill that had the distinction of being both



potent and undetectable when slipped into an unsuspecting woman's drink. And despite changes in the drug's formulation (it now leaves telltale tracers and particles when mixed with liquids), it's likely to remain a "date-rape drug" in the public mind for a long time.

■ **Street Names:** Roofies, rophies, roches.

■ **Appearance:** White tablet, scored on one side, with the manufacturer's name (ROCHE) above the number 1 or 2 (reflecting 1- or 2-mg dosage) imprinted on the back.

■ **Effects:** Like all depressants, Rohypnol reduces anxiety and induces sleep, but with a difference—several, in fact. Subjectively, users are more likely to experience intoxication at low doses, particularly when the drug is used with alcohol. In addition, complete or partial amnesia is a common side effect of Rohypnol.



■ **Risks/side effects:** Besides amnesia, side effects include rapid mood swings and violent outbursts of temper. Overdose is also a potentially life-threatening complication, especially since Rohypnol is so often used with alcohol.

■ **Duration:** Effects begin 20-30 minutes after ingestion and typically continue for 8-12 hours.

■ **Medical Uses:** Although Rohypnol has never been approved for use in the United States, it is used widely throughout the rest of the world as both a tranquilizer and a treatment for insomnia. It is also used as a sedative prior to surgery.



■ **Legal Issues:** Rohypnol was never sold legally in the United States but, prior to 1996, individuals were permitted to bring back a 90-day personal supply of the drug when returning from other countries. This loophole was closed for good by the Drug-Induced Rape Prevention Act, which banned Rohypnol in the United States.

■ **Trends:** Although Rohypnol had been a popular pharmaceutical souvenir for American day-trippers in Mexico (One survey reported that, prior to the ban, 43 percent of all prescriptions declared at the U.S.-Mexico border were for three-month “personal” supplies of the drug), the ban reduced the flood to a trickle. And with new changes in formulation, making it less easily used as a “stealth” drug, Rohypnol’s days as a date-rape drug are numbered. And that suits women’s advocates—and rape-crisis workers—just fine.



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