

fast facts

ghb

liquid 'e',
liquid 'x'

■ **Overview:** GHB (gamma hydroxybutyrate) has gotten its share of media attention lately, due to its club-culture links and (for a time) its semi-legal status. Sold over the counter as a dietary supplement for years, distribution was halted by the Food and Drug Administration in 1990. Still,

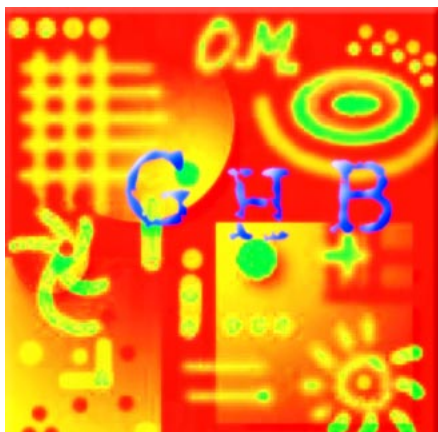


even though the FDA action blocked *sale* of the drug, possession remained legal in most states—legal, at least, until a federal law in 2000 banned all possession of GHB nationwide, due to its alleged links to incidents of date rape.

■ **Street Names:** Liquid 'X', Liquid 'E' (since some effects are similar to the psychedelic drug "ecstasy"), GBH, easy lay, grievous bodily harm.

■ **Appearance:** A clear liquid, GHB is often mixed with juice to conceal its salty, unpleasant taste.

■ **Actions/Effects:** First synthesized by a French researcher in the 1960's, GHB is structurally similar to the neurotransmitter GABA and triggers its effects, by increasing the brain's supply of the neurotransmitters GABA and dopamine. At moderate doses, GHB causes feelings of relaxation, euphoria, and disinhibition much like alcohol. At higher doses, GHB induces a sleep so deep that it can be mistaken for coma.



■ **Risks/Side Effects:** Since GHB occurs naturally in the human body (and serves as a precursor in the production of GABA), the chemical is relatively nontoxic. Still, synthetic forms of GHB can irritate the stomach and cause nausea or vomiting. Confusion and impaired motor skills may also occur, particularly at higher doses, but food can reverse these effects. Use in combination with alcohol intensifies effects and the risk of overdose.



Cook-it kit. Until the ban, kits for making GHB at home were sold openly over the Internet.

■ **Addiction Potential:** Although tolerance to GHB's effects appears with long-term use, it does not produce physical dependence. GHB can be psychologically addictive, however, particularly for those with a history of chemical dependency.

■ **Duration:** Effects begin within 5-20 minutes of ingestion and last 1-3 hours, but can be prolonged through repeated dosing.

■ **Medical Uses:** GHB is used in Europe to ease childbirth, and has also been used to treat insomnia, narcolepsy, and alcoholism.

■ **Trends:** Following reports of drink "spiking," and allegations GHB was used in acts of sexual assault, federal legislation designating GHB as a Schedule I controlled substance was signed into law in February, 2000, banning possession and sale throughout the United States.



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