

fast facts

Soma[®]

■ **Overview:** When is a muscle relaxant *not* a muscle relaxant? When it's Soma[®]. Then it's a tranquilizer, too, and a possible prescription for trouble. That's because Soma is a chemical chameleon, one that morphs in the human body from chemical caterpillar into biological bee —

and it *can* sting. For starters, Soma is literally two drugs in one. The first, *carisoprodol* (its generic name), is a muscle relaxant — or at least, it starts out that way. Then, as it breaks down

SOMA Generic Carisoprodol 350mg	
60 pills	100 pills
\$89	\$109
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in the body, it morphs into a different drug altogether: *meprobamate*. Never heard of it? No wonder. When it was introduced in 1955, under the trade name Miltown[®], meprobamate was a pharmaceutical superstar, the first “minor” tranquilizer, thought to be addiction- and overdose-free. But a funny thing happened on its way into history: It turned out to be neither.

■ **Appearance:** Brand-name Soma[®] is a white tablet, with “Wallace 2001” imprinted on one side. Generic and foreign forms of carisoprodol vary.

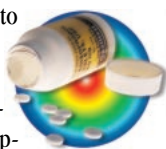
■ **Medical Uses:** Carisoprodol is used to treat muscle spasms and strains, usually combined with physical therapy, exercise, and rest. Meprobamate is still occasionally used to treat anxiety, but has mostly been replaced by benzodiazepine tranquilizers, for safety reasons.



■ **Actions/Effects:** Carisoprodol blocks specific nerve impulses, while meprobamate reduces anxiety. Effects are similar to those of alcohol, and include feelings of relaxation, dizziness, and euphoria, depending on dosage.

■ **Side Effects:** Adverse reactions involve drowsiness, tremor, headache, and unconsciousness. Allergic reactions include rash, itching, asthma attacks, fever, and shock.

■ **Overdose:** A main reason that Miltown fell from favor so fast was its potential for overdose, particularly when used with alcohol and other depressants. Since tolerance to meprobamate's depressant effects can set in before tolerance to carisoprodol's muscle-relaxant properties, overdose symptoms (which include fainting, slowed breathing, and unconsciousness) are serious, and should be regarded as a life-threatening emergency.



■ **Trends:** Soma has emerged in recent years due to its easy availability via offshore Internet pharmacies, and its status as an unregulated controlled substance. Ironically, meprobamate *is* a Schedule IV controlled substance, but carisoprodol has never been scheduled.

■ **Demographics:** Since carisoprodol isn't considered a "recreational" drug, there are few numbers available to chart its spread. Still, it consistently ranks near the top on lists of drugs that often cause overdose and adverse reactions. In 2005, it figured into 19,513 U.S. emergency-room admissions, according to the Drug Abuse Warning Network.



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