

What is Gamma Hydroxy Butyric Acid (GHB)

Gamma Hydroxy Butyric Acid (**GHB**) is a colourless, odourless liquid usually sold in small bottles or vials. GHB is usually swallowed. It can come as a bright blue liquid known as 'blue nitro', and less commonly as a crystal powder. It is also known as G, fantasy, or juice. GHB is a depressant, which means it slows down messages traveling between the brain and the body.

Gamma Butyrolactone (**GBL**) and 1,4-butanediol (**1,4-BD**) are chemicals closely related to GHB and once they enter the body they convert to GHB almost immediately. GBL is thought to be twice as potent as GHB, with a quicker onset whilst 1,4BD has a slower onset.

These drugs are illegal in Australia.

Effects

GHB effects everyone differently, depending on strength of dose (this varies), dose taken, person's tolerance, size, weight and general health and other substances and medications used. GHB can take 15 to 20 minutes to take effect and may last three to four hours. Overdose is common and can be fatal.

At low dose GHB can cause:

- > feelings of euphoria,
- > increased sex drive,
- > lowered inhibitions,
- > drowsiness,
- > tremors,
- > nausea and diarrhoea.

GHB can cause dependence, withdrawal and overdose.

Dependence and Withdrawal

Regular use of GHB can result in dependence and if this occurs, stopping can cause withdrawal. Withdrawal symptoms can vary and can occur six to 24 hours after last use. Withdrawal symptoms can be severe and may include:

- > tremors
- > sweats
- > nausea and/or vomiting, diarrhoea

- > headache
- > anxiety/restlessness.
- > increased heart rate and blood pressure
- > seizures
- > confusion or delirium

Overdose – What to do

GHB is potent and it is easy to overdose. Overdose can result in cardio-respiratory arrest and death.

If you think someone has overdosed or any of the below symptoms are present:

- > unconsciousness
- > confusion, irritation and agitation
- > irregular or shallow breathing
- > blackouts and memory loss
- > vomiting
- > hallucinations

.....**Call 000 for an ambulance and administer first aid.** Stay with them until help arrives. Police will only come if the overdose is suspicious, there has been, or is likely to be a death or ambulance officers call for help.

Reducing the risks

Although there is no safe level of GHB use, the following information may help to reduce the risks:

- > do not use alone
- > take a smaller test dose first and wait for the effect before re-dosing.
- > always measure doses (small volume syringes such as 1 ml may be useful in measuring doses)
- > use as little as possible and set limits on the quantity used in a session
- > only use GHB in safe places
- > tell someone what you are taking
- > avoid using alcohol and other drugs when using GHB
- > practice safe sex

'S-T-A-Y-I-N-G S-A-F-E'

- S** Seek medical attention straight away if you have taken too much GHB/GBL. Do not use other drugs in the hope of reversing the effects.
- T** Two or more substances used at the same time increase the risk of overdose significantly (especially sedatives e.g. alcohol, benzos, ketamine).
- A** Always measure GHB/GBL doses accurately (use for example small syringes or pipettes). Wait until the effects are felt and do not re-dose for at least 2 hours.
- Y** You should avoid using GHB/GBL on your own and always use in a safe place and with someone who has not taken it, as it is common to become unconscious.
- I** If you have used and are going to sleep, sleep on your side in case you are sick. Place sleeping or unconscious friends in the recovery position.
- N** Never drink GHB/GBL straight out of a bottle or pour a dose straight out of a bottle. Always dilute in water and add food colouring to avoid accidental drinking. *Never* keep GHB/GBL in drinks bottles, especially in public venues, where it might be drunk by others not aware of the content.
- G** GHB/GBL is physically addictive and dependence can happen quickly. Avoid frequent use, especially daily use.
- S** Severe and potentially serious GHB/GBL withdrawal symptoms occur if you are dependent and you miss a dose or reduce amounts taken abruptly.
- A** Acute withdrawal symptoms and have no GHB/GBL to ease withdrawal. Seek medical help immediately in an emergency department. It can be a very serious medical emergency.
- F** Find a medical support for planned GHB/GBL detoxification. Do not attempt to stop abruptly on your own. If you want to reduce your dose, do so in *very* small doses until you find medical support.
- E** Look at ways to stabilise your use; for example, consumption diaries can be very helpful in limiting your use. Keep a GHB/GBL diary and record of your doses and times you use.

¹ Abdulrahim D, Bowden-Jones O, on behalf of the NEPTUNE Expert Group. *Guidance on the Management of Acute and Chronic Harms of Club Drugs and Novel Psychoactive substances*. Novel Psychoactive Treatment UK Network (NEPTUNE). London, 2015