

Alcohol and Other Drugs

Understanding GHB.

1800 700 514 (Freecall)
unitingvictas.org.au/aod

What is GHB?

GHB is a common name for a range of substances called gamma hydroxybutyrate. Other names for GHB are 'G' or 'juice'. It's a liquid that has no smell and can sometimes have a salty or plastic-like taste. GHB is a depressant, meaning it slows down messages going to and from your brain - like alcohol, opioids and benzos. When you buy GHB it'll often come in a small container, like a 'sushi fish' (which is approx. 2ml) or a bottle of 'bubble liquid' (approx 20ml).

Common effects include:

- Euphoria or excitement
- Lower inhibitions
- Increased confidence
- Increased sex drive
- Increased sensitivity to touch
- Relaxed muscles

Negative effects include:

- Sedation or loss of consciousness
- Overdose
- Urinary incontinence
- Disorientation or confusion
- Seizures
- Loss of coordination
- Hallucination
- Lower heart rate and body temperature

Reducing risks

The strength of GHB can vary a lot. Being careful when you use can reduce the possible harms.

Here are some ways to use GHB more safely:

- Measure out consistent dose amounts and avoid sipping from the bottle
- If you have a new supply of GHB, start with a small dose
- Wait at least 20 minutes after your first dose before having more so you become aware of the effect it's having on you. A dose can last 3-4 hours, so be careful about taking a top-up dose

- Be aware of the time of your doses – use a phone to make a note, or take a screenshot so you don't forget what time your last dose was
- A drop of food dye to change the colour of the GHB can prevent you from confusing it with water and drinking it accidentally.

Overdose awareness

The difference between a single dose and an overdose of GHB is small and can be difficult to judge. The risk of overdose is increased if GHB is used along with other depressant substances like alcohol, benzos and opioids. This is because these substances and GHB are processed through the same pathways in your brain. A 'stacking' effect can occur when the substances in your body haven't been processed, and the effects of the two substances working together can be delayed – eventually coming on more strongly together.

An overdose or 'blowout' can cause someone to lose consciousness and stop breathing. If you think someone is overdosing, there are some things you should do:

- Check if they respond to touch and speech. If not, call 000 immediately and ask for an ambulance
- If they're breathing and awake, stay with them – don't leave them alone to sleep it off
- Don't offer other drugs like stimulants.

The future is bright.



Withdrawal

Withdrawal from GHB can be mild, moderate or severe, and can be difficult to manage. Withdrawal can begin as soon as 1-2 hours after the last dose and can last for several days, depending on the frequency and amount you use.

Mild and moderate symptoms include:

Anxiety, vomiting, insomnia, tremors, high blood pressure, confusion, a feeling your skin is crawling, hallucinations.

If you're dependent on GHB and miss a dose, you could experience severe withdrawal symptoms. Suddenly reducing or stopping GHB use can be dangerous, and can cause serious harm such as seizures, psychosis, and death. It's recommended you seek medical help if you decide to withdraw.

Severe symptoms include:

Severe anxiety, agitation, paranoia, psychosis, seizures, death, rhabdomyolysis (muscle breakdown).

Getting help with withdrawal

Learn to recognise withdrawal symptoms and if you're feeling unwell after missing a dose, get help at a hospital Emergency Department as soon as you're able to.

Don't try to quit on your own - if you want to reduce or stop using, get some support from an AOD service or medical professional.

Help is available and support options are listed in this brochure.

Contacts

If you want to talk to someone about your own or someone else's alcohol or other drug use, you can get more information from these Victorian and Tasmanian state-wide services. If you are located in another state, these contacts will direct you to your local support services:

DirectLine

24/7 service offering counselling, information and referrals.

T 1800 888 236

directline.org.au

Harm Reduction Victoria

Support and information from other drug using peers.

T 03 9329 1500

hrvic.org.au

QUIT

T 13 78 48

quit.org.au

Family Drug and Gambling Help

Victorian support for family members.

T 1300 660 068

sharc.org.au/sharc-programs/family-drug-gambling-help

Drug alerts

health.vic.gov.au/alcohol-and-drugs/drug-alerts

Alcohol Tobacco and Other Drugs Tasmania Service Directory

atdc.org.au/service-directory

Alcohol and Drug Information Service TAS

24/7 service offering counselling, information and referrals.

T 1800 811 994

Uniting would like to thank consumer partners for drawing on their lived experience to contribute to this series of publications.

