



FROM THE OFFICE OF DR.

Date rape drugs: What parents should know

Date rape drugs are used by rapists to sedate their victims so that they can sexually assault them. Three drugs are commonly used for this purpose: Rohypnol, gamma-hydroxybutyrate (GHB), and ketamine.

In a typical scenario, the rapist identifies the victim and then slips the drug into his or her drink without the victim being aware. These drugs cannot be detected because they are virtually tasteless and odorless and easily dissolve in liquids.

The use of date rape drugs has become such a problem that the United States Congress passed a law called the Drug-Induced Rape Prevention and Punishment Act of 1996. Under this law, anyone who gives a person a drug without his or her knowledge in order to commit a violent crime can receive a fine and a sentence of up to 20 years in prison.

Although date rape drugs have been used in clubs and bars, they can be used in any social setting. That's why it's important for parents to discuss date rape drugs with teens and young adults.

Rohypnol

Street names. Roofies, rophies, roche, forget me pill, roach, rope.

How is it supplied? Rohypnol usually comes in a pill form. Although this drug is not approved for use in the United States, it is smuggled in from other countries where it is legally prescribed as a sedative.

Physical effects. Rohypnol works by depressing

the central nervous system, which controls breathing, brain function, and the ability to move body parts. Within 10 to 20 minutes of ingestion, the drug can cause the victim to feel intoxicated (eg, relaxed, dizzy, drowsy, confused, and uninhibited).

Gamma-hydroxybutyrate (GHB)

Street names. Grievous bodily harm, liquid ecstasy, easy lay, liquid X, liquid G, liquid E, Georgia home boy, cherry meth.

How supplied. GHB is most commonly found in a clear liquid form that tastes slightly salty. It was originally sold as a "natural" food supplement until it was found to be unsafe. It is not approved for use in the United States but is often made in illegal makeshift laboratories with ingredients purchased on the Internet.

Physical effects. GHB is also a central nervous system depressant. Effects are similar to those of Rohypnol and are felt within 10 to 15 minutes of ingestion.

Ketamine

Street names. Special K, "vitamin K," new ecstasy, super K, psychedelic heroin.

How supplied. Ketamine is available in a liquid form. It is a drug used mostly by animal doctors as a tranquilizer.

Physical effects. Within 15 to 60 minutes of ingestion, ketamine can cause hallucinations and dissociation—a feeling in which users feel as though they are separated from their body.

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Letters to the Editor
Cleveland Clinic Journal of Medicine
9500 Euclid Ave., NA32
Cleveland, OH 44195
FAX 216.444.9385
E-MAIL ccjm@ccf.org

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When date rape drugs are mixed together, mixed with alcohol, or mixed with other drugs, the sedating effects occur more quickly and can cause loss of memory, loss of consciousness, or both, and even coma and death.

Preventing date rape

Tell your child to:

- Never accept a drink from someone you don't know well or trust.
- Protect your drink at all times. For example, do not leave it unattended, and try and keep your hand over the top of the cup. If you do leave your drink unattended, throw it away and get a new one.
- Never drink anything from a punch bowl—you don't know what has been added.
- Use the buddy system: you keep an eye on your friends and they keep an eye on you.
- Have a designated driver who can leave a party or establishment with you at any time.

When date rape occurs

A person may have ingested a date rape drug if she or he:

- Feels unusually intoxicated in relation to the amount of alcohol consumed
- Wakes up feeling groggy and can't remember what happened
- Finds signs of having had sex but does not remember doing so. For example, clothing is missing, she or he is not dressed completely, or there is an unrecognized piece of clothing in the room.

In any case, the victim should get to a hospital immediately. Hospital personnel can test the blood and urine for signs of a date rape drug. To preserve any evidence that can be used by the police, the victim should not shower or try to clean or change clothing.