

# Rohypnol



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# What is Rohypnol?

Rohypnol is a sedative-hypnotic originally prescribed for the treatment of insomnia. It is often used as a “club drug” because of its ability to minimize inhibitions and anxiety, and relax muscles. Rohypnol is approximately 10 times stronger than Diazepam (a.k.a. “Valium”). It is currently not medically prescribed in the United States or Canada, but is legally manufactured and prescribed in some European and South American countries. It is usually illegally imported into North America and distributed in its original form: pills.

## The date rape drug: getting “roofied”

Rohypnol is most commonly known as the “date rape drug” because of its ability to make unsuspecting victims of sexual assault unconscious when it is mixed with alcohol (that is, added to their drink). Rohypnol has no taste or colour, making it effective in keeping the victim unaware of its presence. During this time, the victim is sedated, unconscious and unaware of their surroundings, making them easy prey for the victimizer. Combined with alcohol, it takes about 40 minutes for its effects to happen and lasts about 8 to 12 hours.

Also known as:

- Roofies
- Rib
- Roaches
- The date rape drug
- Forget-me pills
- R2

## Who uses it?

Approximately 0.4% of American youth sampled in a recent survey reported experimenting with Rohypnol recreationally. It is used among adolescents for a “cheap drug” because it intensifies the effects of alcohol.

Rohypnol users are mostly youth who live in urban cities. 96% of Rohypnol users also use other drugs recreationally. Rohypnol is often used to increase the effects of opiates, as well as among people adding it to cocaine to alleviate the depressive symptoms experienced by cocaine users. Rohypnol users also frequently reported using inhalants and heroin.

A recent survey in Ontario found that drug-facilitated victims of sexual assault were overwhelmingly women with an average age of 25. According to the Canadian Sexual Assault Centre, about 1400 sexual assault victims every year say that drugs facilitated their abuse. In the USA, 1% of urine samples of rape victims consisted of Rohypnol.

## Adverse Consequences

Short term effects:

- Drowsiness and dizziness
- Relaxation and sedation
- Decreased anxiety
- Nausea, hard time breathing
- Mood swings and violent behavior
- Decreased heart rate
- Memory loss
- Decrease in cognitive and psychomotor function
- Confusion

Prolonged use of Rohypnol can affect learning and memory, lead to psychological and physical dependence, tolerance, and even overdose. Overdoses are characterized by respiratory failure and may be fatal if combined with alcohol. Rohypnol also causes anterograde amnesia, which means victims can't form new memories after ingesting Rohypnol. As a result, events experienced while under the effects of Rohypnol will not be remembered, making the identification of the perpetrator after the assault nearly impossible.

## Treatment

Treatment for Rohypnol dependence includes a 3 to 5 day inpatient detoxification program. Withdrawal symptoms can be life-threatening and therefore intensive treatment is required. Rigorous monitoring of the patient is necessary to adequately manage withdrawal symptoms (Maxwell and Spence, 2005).

When used recreationally, Rohypnol is most commonly taken in combination with other drugs and, therefore, much of the treatment for Rohypnol is done in combination with treatment for other addictions. This may include individual, group, or family counselling, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), and 12-step recovery management.

