

Date-Rape Drugs ~ How To Protect Yourself

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Sexual assault is easier to commit with a victim who is not resisting. Drugs can affect awareness, cognition, and responses, and there has been growing concern about the different types of drugs used to facilitate sexual assault against women and men.

The drugs used cause the victim to be incapacitated, unable to fight back, or, in many cases, unable even to remember than an assault occurred. These types of drugs are commonly referred to as "date-rape" drugs because they are often used as a precursor to sexual assault. However, these drugs have been used in other types of crimes such as robbery and other forms of physical violence.

What are date-rape drugs and what do they do?

Date-rape drugs often work quickly, within 10-20 minutes, and are difficult to spot because they have no smell, taste, texture or color. They come in liquid, powder, and pill forms that can be easily added to drinks without someone's knowledge. The drugs cause victims to become ill, disoriented, very sleepy and unable to move or think clearly, and/or incapable of remembering what happened to them. The effects of the drugs can be intensified by alcohol and can last anywhere from 2-24 hours.

Rapists are using the date rape drugs as a way to overpower their victims. The drugs are, sadly, easily accessible, especially on college campuses and in college towns. Many are legal for other purposes and are therefore readily available and inexpensive. Attackers may bring a person a drink, like a soda, beer, or coffee, and put the drug in it. Or they put the drug in the drink or food while the targeted person is temporarily away from it (i.e. in the bathroom, talking to friends, etc.). Often, when the victim becomes ill or disoriented, the rapist is able to take the victim to a different location easily to commit a sexual assault. The victim wakes up later and is rarely able to remember what happened.

There are at least three date rape drugs:

- Rohypnol (Roofies, Rope, Ruffies, R2, Ruffles, Roche, Forget-pill): is a pill that dissolves in liquids. It is odorless and tasteless, and until recently, colorless. The new pills turn blue when added to liquids. However, the old pills, with no color, are still available. It takes effect after about 10-20 minutes and

last 2-8 hours. It is a strong tranquilizer and causes extreme sleepiness, amnesia, problems talking, and muscle relaxation.

- Gamma Hydroxy Butyrate (GHB, Liquid Extacy, Liquid X, Scoop, Easy Lay) is a liquid, powder or tablet used in a certain form by body builders. In some situations, it can have a slightly salty taste. The drug gives a feeling of calm, relaxation, and sensuality, and, for women especially, it can cause a loss of inhibition. It can cause sudden and deep sleep if given in a large dose. It takes effect in 10-15 minutes and lasts a few hours. The effect can last much longer when taken with alcohol.
- Ketamine Hydrochloride ('K', Special K, Vitamin K, Ket) is a liquid, powder or pill that is an anesthetic used mainly as an animal tranquilizer. It is a newer date-rape drug and causes amnesia, a dream-like feeling or dissociation (the feeling of the mind being separated from the body), loss of sense of time, and hallucinations.

How to protect yourself

- Use the buddy system in group situations. If you have a friend you trust with you, you are safer.
- Watch out for your friends and make sure they are watching out for you when you are places with lots of people or people you don't know and trust like at a party, in a coffeehouse, or in a bar.
- Be aware. Now that you know about date rape drugs, it is your responsibility to watch out for yourself and people you care about.
- Don't go home with someone you don't both know and trust.
- Don't accept drinks when you are alone at a house where there are strangers (like at a party).
- Watch when someone pours you a drink. Better yet, get your own drink.
- Make an agreement ahead of time with friends that you won't let each other leave with people you haven't planned to go with.
- Think before you leave your drink or food unattended at a party or coffeehouse or lounge or anywhere else that people you don't know and trust could have access to it.
- Think before you drink anything out of a punch bowl about where you are and whom you are with.
- If you hear someone "kidding" about date rape drugs, pay attention. That should be a warning to leave that party or individual.
- Monitor the behavior of friends who seem more intoxicated or confused than the amount of alcohol would warrant.

Is alcohol a date rape drug?

While GHB, Rohypnol, and Ketamine are considered "date rape drugs," there are other drugs that affect judgment and behavior and can put a person at risk for unwanted or risky sexual activity. Alcohol is one of those drugs. When a person is drinking alcohol:

- It's harder to think clearly and evaluate a potentially dangerous situation.

- It's harder to resist sexual or physical assault.
- Drinking too much alcohol can also cause blackouts and memory loss.

But remember: even if a victim of sexual assault drank alcohol, he or she is NOT at fault for being assaulted.

If you think that you have been drugged and raped

- Go to the police station or hospital right away.
- Get a urine (pee) test as soon as possible. The drugs leave your system quickly. Rohypnol leaves your body 72 hours after you take it. GHB leaves the body in 12 hours.
- Don't urinate before getting help.
- Don't douche, bathe, or change clothes before getting help. These things may give evidence of the rape.
- You also can call a crisis center or a hotline to talk with a counselor. One national hotline is the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 800-799-SAFE or 800-787-3224 (TDD). Feelings of shame, guilt, fear and shock are normal. It is important to get counseling from a trusted professional.

For more information on date rape drugs in the United States, contact the National Women's Health Information Center at 800-994-9662.

Sexual assault facilitated by drugs can be prevented much of the time by awareness of the problem and by taking charge to minimize the chances of ingesting the drug. Date-rape drugs are used much more often than many people realize and are important to keep in mind in social situations. Simple precautions, such as never taking a drink from someone you don't trust and going out with aware friends, can make a huge difference. Make sure to talk about date-rape drugs with friends and family so that they can be informed and aware as well.