

# Narcotic Educational Foundation of America

Drug Abuse Education Provider of the:

## California Narcotic Officers' Association

# ROHYPNOL: "THE DATE RAPE DRUG"

### QUICK FACTS:

Rohypnol, known as "roofies" and roaches," is a sedative-hypnotic drug. Increasing dosages produces signs of progressive central nervous system depression ranging from sedation to sleep. Chronic use of high doses leads to the development of tolerance, but a level of intoxication can always be reached if the dose is high enough. Chronic use of large doses also leads to physical dependence and withdrawal if usage is abruptly stopped. Withdrawal symptoms can be lessened to a certain extent if a drug from another class of sedatives is substituted. When drugs from this class are taken together, one sees a far greater central nervous system depressant effect than otherwise would be expected, especially with alcohol. This is called "synergism." Overdose will cause mental clouding, loss of muscular coordination, and eventually respiratory arrest.

### HISTORY OF DRUG:

Not since the advent of "ICE," has there been a drug that has caused such a stir in social and criminal justice circles.

Rohypnol, known as "roofies" or "roaches," is a member of the benzodiazepine family of drugs. Also known by its generic name, Rohypnol possesses many of the same properties and qualities as Valium. However, it is approximately five to ten times more potent than Valium in its sedating effect.

The benzodiazepines have been marketed in the United States for about twenty-five years. Today, and for the past several years they have been the most frequently prescribed class of drugs. Rohypnol is one of the benzodiazepines that is NOT marketed for use in the United States. It is marketed in 64 other countries including Mexico. Rohypnol is a prescription benzodiazepine that is primarily used as a preoperative sedative and is the third most prescribed sleeping medication worldwide.

Benzodiazepines, when taken alone, are relatively safe medications that are therapeutically used in the treatment of insomnia, seizure, and anxiety disorders, and has clinical uses in anesthesia. However, if taken with alcohol, the benzodiazepines can have a multiplicative or synergistic effect, which can be deadly to the user.

*(continued column 3, this page)*

### A PERSON UNDER THE INFLUENCE MAY EXHIBIT:

#### SYMPTOMS OF ABUSE

- ◆ Droopy eyelids
- ◆ Bloodshot, watery eyes
- ◆ Slow, slurred speech
- ◆ Impaired judgment
- ◆ Impaired motor skills
- ◆ Disinhibition
- ◆ Amnesia
- ◆ Dizziness
- ◆ Confusion
- ◆ Excitability/aggression

#### SYMPTOMS OF OVERDOSE

- ◆ Drowsiness
- ◆ Mental confusion
- ◆ Lethargy

#### SERIOUS OVERDOSE

- ◆ Poor coordination
- ◆ Reduced reflexes

### History *(continued from column 1)*

Benzodiazepines are addictive, and require medical supervision during the withdrawal or detoxification.

In Southern California, the drug was smuggled across the border from Mexico. In the late 1980's heroin addicts in Los Angeles would use the benzodiazepines to prolong the effects of heroin, or in combinations with methadone or codeine 3's and 4's, to cause a state of euphoria similar to heroin. Hard core alcoholics have been using Rohypnol at the maximum dosage. This would mimic the effect of a blood alcohol content of approximately .15% to .30%.

Rohypnol comes in tablet form and injectables for surgical settings. The dosage units are .5 milligrams, 1 milligram, 2 milligram, and 4 milligrams. The tablets are usually distributed in bubble packaging called blister-pack.

Rohypnol, like other benzodiazepines, exerts its depressive effect by facilitating the inhibitory effects of the neurotransmitter GABA. It rapidly distributes to tissues and is about ten times as potent as diazepam. The depressive effects last from 8 to 12 hours. The tablets are sometimes crushed and "snorted" to hasten the onset and intensity of the effect. There are anecdotal reports of the drug being smoked.

Figure 2: The foil backing of the Rohypnol® "blister pack."



## **BENZODIAZEPINE PHYSICAL DEPENDENCE**

Rohypnol use causes dependence in humans. Once dependence has developed, abstinence induces withdrawal symptoms, including headache, muscle pain, extreme anxiety, tension, restlessness, confusion, and irritability. Numbness, tingling of the extremities, loss of identity, hallucinations, delirium, convulsions, shock and cardiovascular collapse also may occur. Withdrawal seizures can occur a week or more after cessation of use. As with other benzodiazepines, treatment for Rohypnol dependence must be gradual, with use tapering off.

Rohypnol is touted as an effective "parachute" or remedy for the depression that follows a stimulant high. Coming down off of cocaine can be really harsh. People take Rohypnol to ease the crash. Reports indicate that Rohypnol is used by heroin addicts to allay withdrawal symptoms, and to gain a state of oblivion.

## **"DATE RAPE" HOW CAN IT HAPPEN?**

In some cases, the victim may first be given marijuana to smoke, which will make her thirsty. Because Rohypnol dissolves rapidly, and is tasteless, colorless, and odorless, it can be dropped directly into the drink.

The victim will feel the effects within about ten (10) minutes, although the full impact does not hit her for at least an hour. This gives the suspected rapist time to casually exhort the confused victim to his car and drive away. Since the victim was seen both drinking inside a nightclub and staggering out, the suspected person has a room full of people to testify that the victim got drunk and voluntarily left with him.

Within approximately fifteen (15) minutes of ingesting the Rohypnol, the victim will feel drunk and confused. This may be followed by hot and cold flashes, as well as nausea, followed by the inability to speak clearly, and the

apparent partial paralysis of the victim's limbs. Eventually the victim will pass out, but may wake up intermittently during the rape.

One of Rohypnol's unique characteristics is the loss of memory suffered by the victim. (Medical literature indicates that this side effect is much less severe with frequent Rohypnol use.) Obviously, this is one of the most difficult aspects of prosecuting a Rohypnol-rape case. In addition, Rohypnol remains in the victim's urine in a measurable amount for only about three days, which is barely enough time for a drugged victim to sober up and contact the police. Fortunately, in many cases the person administering the drug could not resist bragging to friends about their Rohypnol conquests, which once discovered, provides the potential for compelling testimony at trial.

### **STREET NAMES:**

- ◆ ROACHIES
- ◆ LA ROCHA
- ◆ ROPE
- ◆ RIB ROCHE
- ◆ ROOFIES
- ◆ RUFFIES
- ◆ MEXICAN VALIUM
- ◆ R-2
- ◆ ROACH - 2
- ◆ CHE
- ◆ ROACHE VITAMINS

## **A HOUSEWIFE'S "LITTLE HELPER"**

The benzodiazepines enabled millions of housewives to "get by with a little help from their friends." These substances were the subject of heavy advertising, much of it depicting women in need of relief from tension and anxiety. Drug companies offered their products as aids in coping with the normal problems of life. Consumers often become so dependent on these substances that they could not function without them, having lost the ability to deal with normal levels of stress. As a result of unfavorable attention by health and consumer organizations, the drug manufacturers began to shift their focus, but still promoted their abilities of handling stress.

Even though Rohypnol is not legally sold in the United States, the pharmaceutical companies are fighting the scheduling of this drug as a Schedule I. They believe that as the United States goes so goes many other countries who have ties to the U.S. This would limit the availability of this drug worldwide.

## **AMNESIA-PRODUCING EFFECTS**

Police Departments in several parts of the country report that after ingestion of "roofies" several young women have reported waking up in frat houses with no clothes on, finding themselves in unfamiliar surroundings with unfamiliar people, or having been sexually assaulted. An amnesia-producing effect of "roofies" may prevent users from remembering how or why they took the drug or even that they were given it by others. This makes investigation of sexually related or other offenses very difficult and may account for repeated reports of "date rapes" involving the use of this drug.

## **CATEGORIES OF ROHYPNOL USERS**

Rohypnol users appear to fall into two main categories. The first group includes young adult males who search for their victims in local nightclubs. The second group includes high school students who are quickly adopting Rohypnol as their drug of choice. This spans both public and private schools.

Rohypnol has become popular with teenage gangs, where its use is frequently required for gang initiation. In addition, teenage girls who attend gang parties often willingly ingest Rohypnol, and are then raped by multiple persons after they pass out.

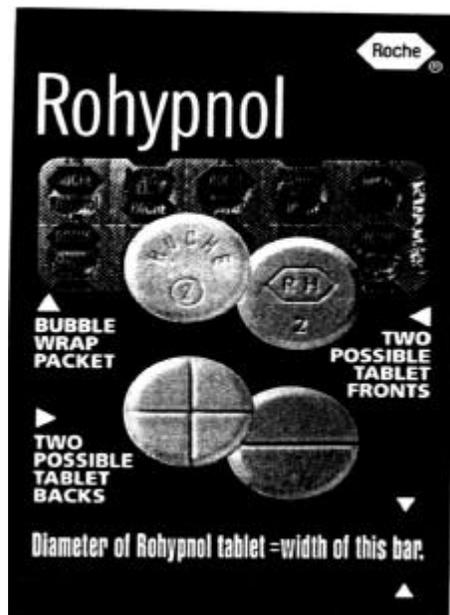
## POTENTIAL FOR ABUSE IS IT HIGH?

The benzodiazepines have an upper limit of effectiveness — after a certain point. It is reported that increasing the dosage beyond the upper limit will not increase the effect, and overdoses are rarely fatal. It is further reported that even when a benzodiazepine is taken in an overdose of 50 to 100 times the usual therapeutic dose, fatalities from respiratory depression are rare. A life-endangering central nervous system depression can result when benzodiazepines are used in conjunction with alcohol. Certain researchers argue that the “potential for (benzodiazepine) abuse, addiction, tolerance and dependence may be at least as great as the barbiturates and perhaps even greater.”

## ROHYPNOL WHAT'S ALL THE FUSS?

Rohypnol reduces inhibitions and judgment, which may provoke violent or aggressive behavior. It produces conscious anesthesia (the person is awake, but does not recall the incident), and if taken to excess will cause addiction that could be life-threatening if withdrawal is not medically supervised.

The user becomes exposed to a greater chance of physical exploitation. For women particularly, this drug, in combination with alcohol or without, poses a significant risk. Tagged as the “date rape drug,” the drug can impair judgment and inhibitions to the extent that a woman may incoherently agree to sex.



## INTOXICATION AND OVERDOSE

An individual intoxicated on Rohypnol will appear the same as someone intoxicated on alcohol or other sleeping pills. Manifestations include slurred speech, impaired judgment, and difficulty walking. Pupil size is not a reliable indicator of use. Some people are easily irritated and may have angry outbursts with little provocation. Some people report personality changes and participate in activities such as stealing or fighting that they would not do, or would realize were stupid, while sober. People who seem to be awake and functioning may still not remember what they did some of the time while they were intoxicated (similar to an alcohol blackout). Some may be injured without any recollection of the cause. The blackout may begin shortly after ingestion of the tablets and last for many hours (memory for events prior to ingestion is usually not affected).

Taken alone, even at high doses, benzodiazepines are unlikely to result in death. They commonly result in drowsiness, mental confusion or lethargy. In combination with alcohol, deaths have occurred. A person who is difficult to arouse or who has difficulty breathing following ingestion of one of these medications with or without alcohol, should be taken to an emergency room as soon as possible.