

Depressants ●

What are depressants?

Depressant substances reduce arousal and stimulation. They do not necessarily make a person feel depressed. They affect the central nervous system, slowing down the messages between the brain and the body.

They can affect concentration and coordination. They slow down the person's ability to respond to unexpected situations. In small doses they can cause a person to feel more relaxed and less inhibited.

In larger doses they can cause drowsiness, vomiting, unconsciousness and death.

Types of depressants commonly used

- alcohol
- benzodiazepines
- GHB/GBL
- Inhalants/solvents
- Kava.

How are they used?

How depressants are used depends on the specific type, for example alcohol is drunk and benzodiazepines are usually swallowed but can also be injected. Generally speaking, depressants can be swallowed, drunk as a beverage, injected, snorted or inhaled.

Effects of depressants

There is no safe level of drug use. Use of any drug always carries some risk. It's important to be careful when taking any type of drug.

Depressants affect everyone differently, based on:

- size, weight and health
- whether the person is used to taking it
- whether other drugs are taken around the same time
- the amount taken
- the strength of the drug (this varies from batch to batch with illegally produced drugs).

The onset and effects of depressants vary according to the type and specific chemical. Some depressants may work instantly, with effects only lasting for a short time (such as inhalants), while other depressants may take longer for the effects to start and the duration of effects may last longer.

In general, when small to low doses of depressants are taken, the following effects may be experienced:

- reduced inhibitions
- enhanced mood
- reduced anxiety
- slowed reaction time
- impaired judgement
- slowed breathing
- increased risk of accident or injury.

Higher doses can result in:

- impaired judgement and coordination
- vomiting
- irregular or shallow breathing
- blackouts and memory loss
- unconsciousness
- coma
- death

Using depressants with other drugs

- Alcohol + benzodiazepines: decreased heart rate and breathing; overdose more likely.
- Benzodiazepines + opiates (such as heroin): breathing difficulties; an increased risk of overdose and death.

Find out more about overdose at adf.org.au/insights/overdose

Health and Safety

Use of depressants is likely to be more dangerous when:

- taken in combination with alcohol or other drugs, particularly
- driving or operating heavy machinery
- judgment or motor coordination is required
- alone (in case medical assistance is required).

The chemical composition of GHB/GBL is highly variable. It's very easy to take too much GHB: the difference between the amount needed to get high and the amount that causes an overdose can

be hard to judge. Use of any drug always carries some risk, however, if you choose to take it, always try a small test amount first.

If drinking alcohol, stay hydrated and have something to eat before and while drinking.

Dependence and tolerance

People who use depressants regularly can develop dependence and tolerance to them. Tolerance means they need to take larger amounts of depressants to get the same effect. Dependence on depressants can be psychological, physical, or both.

People who are dependent on depressants find that using the drug becomes far more important than other activities in their life. They crave them and find it very difficult to stop using them.

People who are psychologically dependent on depressants may find they feel an urge to use them when they are in specific surroundings or socialising with friends. Physical dependence occurs when a person's body adapts to the depressants and gets used to functioning with the depressant present.

Always call an ambulance on triple zero (000) if an overdose is suspected: tell the paramedic exactly what has been taken. Paramedics are there to help and will not involve the police unless there is a danger to themselves or others.

Other help, support services and resources

Links to further help and support • adf.org.au/help-support/

Information on benzodiazepines • adf.org.au/drug-facts/benzodiazepines/

● Further information

DrugInfo • 1300 85 85 84

Free confidential information and advice about alcohol and other drugs (9am - 5pm, Mon-Fri)

Family Drug Help • 1300 660 068 • www.familydrughelp.com.au (Victorian-based)

Services are available to support those around you who may be affected by your drug use. As well as providing understanding, they can provide information about how best to help during treatment.

Family Drug Support • 1300 368 186 • www.fds.org.au (Australia-wide)



● Stay informed

 twitter.com/alcoholdrugfdn

 facebook.com/alcoholdrugfdn

● Contact us

 1300 85 85 84

 adf.org.au