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Dear Alice,

A lot of my friends have made the switch from Ecstasy to GHB. I do X sometimes when I go to clubs, and this is fine for me. I'm just wondering what GHB is, and if I'm missing a good time by sticking with tradition.

X is Enough

Answer

Dear X is Enough,

Sometimes it's a good thing to be satisfied with what you have. If you've taken ecstasy before, and know how to safely handle yourself on it, then it might be wise not to rock the boat. Both ecstasy and GHB are illegal drugs, deemed so because the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) considers them unsafe and potentially lethal. But since you asked, here's the scoop on GHB.

Gamma hydroxybutyrate (GHB) is often called "liquid ecstasy" because like X, it inspires a tendency to be touchy-feely and relaxed. However, its overall impact is more sedative than ecstasy, as GHB is a powerful relaxant and sleep-inducer, whereas X is an activity-inducing amphetamine. In fact, X is sometimes taken with GHB to counteract GHB's mellowing qualities. GHB and metabolites do occur in very small quantities naturally in the human body and some very limited use of the substance has been approved in the U.S. to treat narcolepsy.

GHB, first synthesized in 1960, was used initially as an anesthetic. But this use quickly ended because of GHB's lack of analgesic properties and its tendency to cause seizure-like activity. GHB came back on the scene again in the late 1980s as a fat-burning supplement for body builders and dieters, but a corresponding rise of GHB-related deaths caused the FDA to make its manufacture and sale illegal. Since then GHB has been used illicitly as a party drug, prevalent at dance and music clubs as an alternative to ecstasy and amphetamines. Ecstasy became illegal around the same time as GHB — in the mid 1980s — banned for similar complications of dangerous side-effects and death. Finally, non-medical possession of GHB became illegal in the U.S. in 2000.

The exact effects of GHB can vary from person to person, but those who use GHB generally experience a relief from anxiety and increased relaxation. As the dose increases, the sedative effect of GHB can intensify and lead to sleep, coma, or death. Overdoses of GHB can also cause memory loss, vertigo, reduced heart rate, seizures, insomnia, anxiety, tremors, and respiratory failure, and when mixed with alcohol, can result in nausea and difficulty breathing.

Something to keep in mind with drugs like ecstasy and GHB is that they can often be used to facilitate sexual assaults, rape, and other predatory behaviors. Because they are colorless, odorless, and for the most part tasteless, they can be easily slipped into a drink undetected, and because these drugs often cause lapses in memory or alertness, victims may not be aware of what is happening. Memory impairment can also cloud evidence and accurate reporting of the incident.

Both GHB and ecstasy can be dangerous drugs, and their use should not be taken lightly. It's understandable that if your friends are enjoying experimenting with a new drug that you might be tempted to join in the fun, and it's true that different drugs can produce different kinds of highs, but they can also bring on new lows and risks. Sometimes the safest way of having a good time might be the old-fashioned tricks of surrounding yourself with people you like, wearing something awesome, and letting the music, the giddiness of conversation, and your stylin' dance moves help to ease your inhibitions the natural way.

Alice!

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