

Rohypnol[®]

Generic name: flunitrazepam

Brand name: Rohypnol[®]

Street name(s): roofies, rib, rope, roach, rochas dos, R-2, mind erasers, mexican valium, rophies

Miscellaneous:

- Currently, Rohypnol[®] is used in 82 countries outside of the United States as a surgical anesthetic, though it is banned in the U.S. The two most common reported routes of importation currently are from Mexico and Europe, respectively.¹
- As indicated by its medicinal suffix, flunitrazepam is in the benzodiazepine family of medications.¹⁻¹⁰
- It dominates its relative Valium[®] (diazepam), in strength, being ten times more potent.²⁻⁴
- Ironically, the same traits, potency included, that combine to make flunitrazepam a useful anesthetic simultaneously make it an ideal drug for date rape.
- Though most illegal drugs are expensive to buy/synthesize on the street, flunitrazepam does not follow suit. Available in 1 mg and 2 mg dosage forms, Rohypnol[®] can be purchased for as little as one dollar per pill.²⁻⁴
- Dosages of Rohypnol[®] distributed “on the street” are often combined with other sedatives, analgesics and hallucinogens for a multitude of reasons. The primary intention for combining Rohypnol[®] with sedatives and analgesics concerns the potentiation of its effects. On an interesting twist, some offenders report their reason for combining the drug with hallucinogens (usually LSD, psilocybin or marijuana) as a substitute for the trauma of the victim’s experience. In other words, meaning that the manifestations caused by the hallucinogen will take the place of the rape in the victim’s mind during the attack.

Pharmaceutical Properties:

Flunitrazepam’s dissolution rate is very rapid, enabling it to be dissolved within seconds in a liquid solution. Acidic (pop, juice, etc.) and alcoholic solution environments potentiate this process. Once dissolved into a solution, the drug historically is colorless, odorless and tasteless.^{2-4,6}

*The Hoffman-LaRoche company (the manufacturer of Rohypnol[®]) is currently making reformulations of the drug to impede its use in date rape. Included in these reformulations are the retarding of the dissolution rate and the change of the pill’s color from white to blue.² The color change will make a dissolved beverage appear blue as a compared to the current clear coloration.

Uses:

Surgical anesthetic, sedative/hypnotic.²⁻⁶

* While under the influence, the patient will be sedated near the point of comatose, unable to combat attackers either physically or verbally.

Administration:

Oral ingestion.

Mechanism/Pharmacology:

Like the other members of the benzodiazepine family, flunitrazepam binds to postsynaptic benzodiazepine receptors on GABA neurons. Once bound, flunitrazepam enhances “the inhibitory effect of GABA on neuronal excitability,”⁷ which “results by increased neuronal membrane permeability to chloride ions.”⁷ “This shift in chloride ions results in hyperpolarization and stabilization.”⁷

Rohypnol’s effects onset in 20-30 minutes, peak at one hour and persist for up to eight hours.

Side effects:

Psychological: Confusion, amnesia. All references site the amnesia as being severe enough that the patient will not be able to recount details of the event, and most likely will not even be able to recall the event itself whatsoever. Amnesiac effects are evident throughout the influence of the drug, not just following its course.²⁻⁶

Physical: Drowsiness, lethargy, CNS depression, somnolence, fatigue.²⁻⁶

Testing:

Rohypnol can be detected via a blood test for up to 72 hours after ingestion, and urine and hair analysis is also possible.^{2-3,8-10} Time restrictions and efficiency statistics are currently being generated to ensure the quality of the latter two tests.⁸⁻¹⁰ It should be noted that “Date-rape prevention” kits are available that provide buyers with test strips that may be dipped in beverages and change to a designated indicator color (i.e. red) if a drink has been “spiked” with a drug commonly used in cases of date-rape (GHB, Rohypnol[®], ketamine, etc.).

Treatment:

Primarily symptomatic. Flumazenil, a direct benzodiazepine antagonist, may be administered to the patient if they are admitted to a medical care setting while under the influence of the drug.

Synthesis:

With flunitrazepam being legally available in other countries, the current method of attainment is importation and not synthesis.¹ With the recent reformulations made by Hoffman-LaRoche to impede its use in date rape, however, the illegal synthesis of this drug may become prevalent.

User Identification:

Physical: Drowsiness, lethargy, slurred/incoherent/uninterpretable conversation, CNS depression, somnolence.²⁻⁶

Citation References:

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