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[Home](#) > Rohypnol ("Roofie") and rape

Rohypnol ("Roofie") and rape ^[1]

Dear Alice,

I have heard about pills one can take to increase the effects of alcohol while lowering the actual consumption level (in essence, getting drunk off of one beer). I think the pill might be called roche (I don't know how it is spelled — pronounced row-shay). Could you describe more about this pill and its dangers?

—Curious and Concerned

Answer

Dear Curious and Concerned,

You may be referring to a drug called Rohypnol (flunitrazepam), street-named "roofies," "roachies," "rophies," "ruffies," "roofenol," "roche," "La Rocha," "rope," and "the forget pill." But as we know, drug street names change all the time. This hypnotic sedative enhances the effects of alcohol: decreased inhibition, sleepiness, and memory loss. However, the drug's medical purpose is quite different; Rohypnol is primarily used as a surgical anesthetic or sleeping pill in about eighty countries, although it is not available legitimately in the United States. Drug enforcement officials say that Rohypnol illegally enters the United States from Mexico, Colombia, and Europe.

Unfortunately, the use of drugs by sex abusers to sedate their victims has been practiced for centuries. Many drugs, primarily from the same family of drugs as Rohypnol (benzodiazepines), can be used as "rape drugs." Known as a "date rape drug," Rohypnol has been used to secretly sedate and sexually assault women and men. Due to its potential for abuse by people intending to coerce others into sexual activity, Rohypnol's manufacturer reformulated the drug so that it dissolves more slowly in a beverage and tints the beverage a bright blue (or makes dark colored drinks cloudy). Rohypnol also creates a bitter taste when dissolved in alcohol. Knowing the signs of a roofie-tainted drink may help people avoid beverages that have been spiked with the drug.

To avoid possibly being given a drink with Rohypnol, be aware of the color, texture, and taste of your drinks; don't accept pre-purchased, open drinks of any kind from strangers or casual acquaintances (unfortunately, this may harken back to mom and dad saying, "Don't accept candy

from strangers"). Rohypnol's misuse also makes it advisable not to leave drinks unattended, even in familiar surroundings.

Although there is a myth that roofies cannot be detected in a person's urine, this is false. It is possible for people who suspect that they were drugged to be tested for the presence of Rohypnol and other drugs. These drugs can usually be detected in urine for about three days after ingestion, sometimes even a little longer. However, the sooner someone is tested, the better. Most rape crisis centers and hospitals will be able to run these tests.

For more information on date rape drugs, such as Rohypnol and GHB, check out womenshealth.gov [2], or contact a rape crisis center. This may be a *big* drag, but until roofie is run out of town, prevention and education is the best way to protect yourself and others. So, spread the word.

Alice!

Category:

[Alcohol & Other Drugs](#) [3]

[Sedatives, Tranquillizers, & Other Depressants](#) [4]

[Relationships](#) [5]

[Nonconsensual Relationships](#) [6]

Related questions

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[GHB, aka "liquid ecstasy"](#) [8]

[Was I molested?](#) [9]

[I'm sure I was drunk, but I'm not sure if I had sex](#) [10]

[Was I raped?](#) [11]

[Sex offender... forever?](#) [12]

[Vitamin A\(bsolutely needed\)?](#) [13]

Resources

[Sexual Violence Response & Rape Crisis/Anti-Violence Support Center](#) [14]

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Footer menu

▼ [Contact Alice!](#)

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Links

- [1] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/rohypnol-roofie-and-rape>
- [2] <http://www.womenshealth.gov/publications/our-publications/fact-sheet/date-rape-drugs.cfm>
- [3] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/alcohol-other-drugs>
- [4] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/sedatives-tranquillizers-other-depressants>
- [5] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/relationships>
- [6] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/nonconsensual-relationships>
- [7] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/sex-four-friends-%E2%80%94-mutual>
- [8] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/ghb-aka-liquid-ecstasy>
- [9] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/was-i-molested>
- [10] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/im-sure-i-was-drunk-im-not-sure-if-i-had-sex>
- [11] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/was-i-raped>
- [12] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/sex-offender-forever>
- [13] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/vitamin-absolutely-needed>
- [14] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/resource/sexual-violence-response-rape-crisisanti-violence-support-center>