

Rohypnol – The Date Rape Drug

When Jennifer went out with friends for a night of drinking and dancing, she never imagined she'd black out and become incoherent. "I drank maybe two mixed drinks, when I started to feel strange." says the fourth-year university student. "I didn't know what was going on. I was vomiting and sick at the bar." She was ill all through the night and into the next day. Not only did Jennifer feel terrible, but she also had trouble remembering. "I hardly remember a thing from that night," she says, "I totally blacked out. It was the first time anything like this ever happened to me."

Jennifer was likely the victim of a drug called *Rohypnol*, also known as the "date rape drug". While Jennifer's experience was very uncomfortable, she was – in retrospect – one of the lucky ones. She was not raped.

Rohypnol is manufactured as a sleeping pill and is said to be 10 times stronger than Valium. When consumed, the drug causes dizziness, nausea, confusion and most alarmingly, amnesia. Although Rohypnol is illegal in Canada, it is readily available because it is smuggled into the country, primarily from Mexico and South America, where it is legal. Rohypnol is a small white pill, similar in appearance to Tylenol. It is odorless, tasteless and dissolves easily in drinks. The drug takes affect very quickly (20 – 30 minutes), with its effects peaking within two hours and lasting up to eight hours.

It's presence in the body is hard to detect unless a urine test is taken within 24 hours after taking the drug. Because of this, many "date rapes" go unreported. Also, effects of the drug are often confused with drunkenness and there is little recollection of the incident. Many women are less likely to report a date rape because they feel that because it is usually used in combination with alcohol, that they are somehow to blame.

Here are some tips that may help save you from "date rape":

- Do not accept drinks from strangers. It may seem rude to turn it down, but it's not worth the risk.
- If you do take a drink from a stranger, at least make sure you open it yourself or that you see it being mixed and poured.
- Do not leave your drink unattended. If you can't take your drink with you, give it to someone you trust to hold for you.
- Do not turn your back on your drink. It only takes a second to drop something into the bottle or glass.
- If you think that you have ingested Rohypnol, report it immediately, especially if you think that you have also been sexually assaulted.
- When you go out, make sure you are with someone you trust. Look out for your friends and make sure they return the favor. Create a buddy system and never trust your safety with a stranger or casual acquaintance.
- When you go out onto the dance floor, designate one of your friends to stay behind and watch the drinks.
- Tell all your friends about Rohypnol. Become aware and make other aware.