



Phenibut (beta-phenyl-gamma-aminobutyric acid)

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Phenibut was first developed in Russia and used clinically since the 1960's for anxiety, sleep disorders, post-traumatic stress disorders, stuttering and the treatment of other neuroses. Phenibut is an analog of the amino acid gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA) featuring the addition of a phenyl ring that allows the compound to more easily cross the blood-brain barrier and which also changes its activity profile (1). Phenibut is an agonist at GABA (B) receptors, although it does have some effect on GABA (A) receptors as well (2). The most well established role of GABA (B) receptors is inhibition of the release of some neurotransmitters, and it may also serve as a negative feedback mechanism for GABA release (3). Phenibut also increases dopamine levels, and has been postulated that the structural similarity to beta-phenylethylamine (PEA) may play a role in this effect (2). Anxiety reduction is a direct effect of phenibut in both human and animal studies (4). Phenibut has certain nootropic (cognitive enhancer) effects that include neuroprotection by increasing resistance to the detrimental effects of edema on mitochondria and energy production in the brain (5). Phenibut also protects dopaminergic neurons and has improved the condition of patients being treated with anti-parkinsonic drugs (6).

In recent months there has been negative information published regarding the safety and legality of phenibut, including the claim that phenibut is not an approved drug in the U.S. However, this claim is misleading because in the U.S. phenibut is not actually classified as a "drug." According to the DSHEA (Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act of 1994), phenibut is classified as a dietary supplement and contains a dietary ingredient. Dietary supplements are "food" as defined in the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act (FD&C Act). Additionally, Truth in Labeling for dietary supplements does fall within FDA regulation and jurisdiction.

There have been some accusations alleging the "dangers" of phenibut. Potential serious side effects and "great risk" for addiction were a few charges recently made about phenibut by the Council for Responsible Nutrition. Oftentimes, the habit forming nature of phenibut is more psychological than physiological and could be attributed to the fact that patients enjoy feeling less anxiety and stress in their lives, but some may take more than they need. With long term use and higher than recommended doses of phenibut, unwanted symptoms may occur. However, this ingredient has been used for decades with few reported contraindications (side effects). Thousands of doctors have been successfully prescribing nutritional supplements containing phenibut for their patients suffering from anxiety and stress as an effective and natural alternative to prescription anxiety drugs such as diazepam, alprazolam, lorazepam, etc.

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