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What are inhalants?

Inhalants are common household, industrial and medical products that produce vapours, which some people inhale (breathe in) to make them feel intoxicated or high.¹

Some common inhalants include:

- aerosol spray
- chrome-based paint
- paint and paint thinner
- felt-tipped pens
- correction fluid (e.g. 'Liquid Paper')
- gas from lighters or barbecues (butane)
- cleaning fluid
- glue
- petrol
- Nitrous oxide.¹

Other names

Glue, gas, gasoline, sniff, huff, chroming, poppers.

How are they used?

Inhalants are breathed in through the nose or mouth. They may be sprayed into a plastic bag, poured into a bottle or soaked onto a cloth or sleeve before being inhaled.

Sometimes they are inhaled directly from the container or are sprayed directly into the mouth or nose. This method is very dangerous because it can cause suffocation.²

O PRINT



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Effects of Inhalants

There is no safe level of drug use. Use of any drug always carries some risk. It's important to be careful when taking any type of drug.

Inhalants affect everyone differently, based on:

- size, weight and health
- whether the person is used to taking it
- whether other drugs are taken around the same time
- the amount taken
- · the strength of the drug
- · amount of fresh air breathed while sniffing
- amount of physical activity before and after sniffing.

Sniffing can cause:

- intoxication
- nausea
- headaches
- injuries
- delirium
- seizures
- pneumonia from inhaling vomit
- dependence
- brain damage
- coma
- abnormal heart rhythm
- sudden death
- asphyxiation (if using a plastic bag).³

Sniffing is always risky, but some situations make it even more dangerous:

- sniffing in an enclosed space or indoors
- running or doing other physical activity after sniffing (could cause death due to cardiac sensitisation)
- mixing sniffing with medicines or illegal drugs
- sniffing when the person has other health problems.³

Overdose

If you inhale a substance many times or use a particularly strong inhalant, you could overdose. Call an ambulance straight away by dialling triple zero (000) if you have any of these symptoms (ambulance officers don't need to involve the police):

- nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea
- irregular heartbeat
- chest pain
- hallucinations
- blackout, seizures and coma.^{1,4}

Sudden sniffing death

Inhaling aerosol sprays, cleaning and correction fluids, and model aeroplane cement has been known to cause sudden death. It is believed that chemicals in these products can cause heart failure, particularly if the person is stressed or does heavy exercise after inhaling. This is very rare.³

Low aromatic fuels

Unleaded petrol has been replaced by <u>low aromatic fuels</u> such as BP's Opal fuel in some rural and remote communities in Australia. Sniffing low aromatic fuels does not produce a high, but can still cause damage to a person's health including death.⁵

Coming down

In the days after inhalant use, you may experience:

- headache
- nausea
- dizziness
- drowsiness
- mental numbness.¹

Long-term effects

Regular use of inhalants may eventually cause:

- · irritability and depression
- memory loss
- reduced attention span and ability to think clearly
- · pimples around the mouth and lips
- pale appearance
- tremors
- weight loss
- reduced growth potential (height)
- tiredness
- excessive thirst
- loss of sense of smell and hearing
- problems with blood production, which may result in anaemia, irregular heartbeat, heart muscle damage
- chest pain and angina
- indigestion and stomach ulcers
- liver and kidney damage
- needing to use more to get the same effect
- · dependence on inhalants
- financial, work and social problems.^{1,4,6}

Most of these long-term effects can be reversed if use is stopped. However, some inhalants, such as cleaning products, correction fluid, aerosol sprays and petrol can cause permanent damage.⁴

Some chemicals can build up in the body and damage the stomach, intestines, brain, nervous system, kidneys and liver.^{1,4}

Using inhalants with other drugs

The effects of taking inhalants with other drugs – including over-the-counter or prescribed medications – can be unpredictable and dangerous, and could include:

 Inhalants + <u>alcohol</u>, <u>benzodiazepines</u> or <u>opiates</u>: enormous strain on the body, and can affect breathing rate and may increase the risk of passing out and suffocating or choking on vomit.⁷

Withdrawal

Giving up inhalants after using them for a long time is challenging because the body has to get used to functioning without them. Withdrawal symptoms usually start 24-48 hours after the last use, and may last for 2 to 5 days.4 These symptoms can include:

- hangover
- · headache, nausea and stomach pain
- tiredness, shakiness, tremors
- cramps
- hallucinations and visual disorders, such as seeing spots.⁴



Getting help

If your use of inhalants is affecting your health, family, relationships, work, school, financial or other life situations, you can find help and support.



Effects

abnormal heart rhythm, asphyxiation, brain damage, delirium, dependence, headache, intoxication, nausea, seizures, sudden death