

Inhalants

Inhalants (also known as poppers, gas, or glue) are commercial or household products that contain chemical vapours or gases which can create a feeling of being high when inhaled. This type of misuse can be dangerous to one's health and well-being. Some common household products that are used as inhalants include gasoline, paint thinner, glue, white-out and felt-tip markers. Children, teens and young adults are at a high risk for misuse because these items are cheap and available at many stores.

Misusing inhalants can result in mind-altering effects such as hallucinations, delusions and euphoria. Some ways that people misuse inhalants include: sniffing ("snorting") from a container, or breathing in fumes from a plastic bag ("bagging"), and by placing a soaked rag against the mouth and then inhaling ("huffing"). Inhalant users will try household, industrial or medical products that are not meant to be inhaled.

There are four types of inhalants:

- **Aerosols** are substances that come in the form of spray cans, hair spray and paint cans. These products are misused by spraying into the nose or are "huffed" from a bag.
- **Nitrites** are often sold in the form of odourizers for rooms and are misused by inhaling from the bottle or cloth.
- **Nitrous oxide** (also known as nitro, NOS or laughing gas) is a gas that is misused by breathing it from aerosol cans or balloons.
- **Volatile solvents** are the most misused of all the inhalants. They include products such as paint thinners, markers, cleaning supplies and gasoline.

Short-Term Effects

An inhalant can change the way you feel right after you breathe it in. The high you get from inhaling solvents can make you feel disoriented and excited. You might have headaches and feel sleepy from inhalants. Inhaling nitrous oxide can make it hard for you to breathe. It can also cause you to feel like

you are dreaming and could affect your ability to move your body.

Other side effects of inhalants include:

- feeling dizzy and drowsy;
- feeling drunk and slurring your words;
- hallucinating;
- throwing up;
- coughing, sneezing and being unsteady on your feet;
- having reflexes that are slow; and
- your eyes being bothered by light.

Misusing inhalants can result in an addiction. A person may crave the feeling of being high which pulls them back to misusing the drug.

Long-Term Effects

Long-term use can result in permanent damage to your body. This might include liver and kidney failure, abnormal heart rhythms and blood vessel damage. Heavy use of nitrous oxide inhalants can harm your body's nerves and can affect your ability to feel, smell and see. You also risk having poor balance and coordination, severe and permanent brain damage, and mood swings. Visible signs of long-term inhalant misuse can include: nosebleeds, pale skin, sores on your mouth and nose, bloodshot eyes, weight loss and hearing loss. Regular users of inhalants might develop a tolerance. This means that you need to use a greater amount of the inhalant to receive the same high over time.

Some other risks faced by long-term inhalant users are:

- overdose;
- relationship problems with family and friends;
- problems with school or work; and
- legal issues.

Misusing inhalants can cause permanent damage to your hearing.

How does it work?

Inhalants are carried through your blood to your body fat. The brain, liver and kidneys, which are high in fat content, can be damaged from inhalant misuse. Nitrite based inhalants can cause blood to move quickly to your brain which will give you a “rush.” The misuse of inhalants can cause a short-term high lasting about 45 minutes.

Inhalants and Dependency

Misusing inhalants can result in an addiction. A person might go through withdrawal symptoms after they stop using inhalants for a period of time. You might feel like throwing up, have no desire to eat, experience tremors, anxiety attacks, depression and paranoia, delusions, dilated pupils, or bad mood swings. Wanting to use inhalants could become more important than your work, family, friends and other relationships.

Inhalants can catch fire easily, with tragic results.

Did you know?

Sniffing nitrous oxide can starve the body of oxygen, which can cause permanent damage or death. “Sudden Sniffing Death Syndrome” can happen to a person even if they are healthy and misuse inhalants just once.

Using inhalants during pregnancy and breastfeeding is not safe. Studies with animals have shown that birth weight may be lowered due to inhalant misuse during pregnancy. Inhaling chemicals will also affect breast milk and can enter the baby’s body during breastfeeding.

Brain damage from inhalant misuse is usually permanent.

Who can you contact if you need help regarding drug use?

Contact your local Addictions/Mental Health Services office, doctor or other health care provider if you need more information. To locate services near you:

- Visit www.saskatchewan.ca/addictions.
- Visit HealthLine Online at healthlineonline.ca.
- Call HealthLine at 811. Specially trained staff are available to provide mental health and addictions crisis support, in a safe and confidential manner.



NOTE: This material is for information only and should not replace advice from an Addictions or Mental Health Counsellor, doctor or other health care provider.

To access fact sheet sources please contact the Saskatchewan Ministry of Health at (306) 787-7239.