



Street names

Bagging, gas, glue, huffing, inhaling, sniffing, (glue, lighter fluid, petrol), chroming (sniffing paint), amyl, poppers, rush (amyl nitrate), nangs, bulbs, laughing gas, nitro, N2O, whippets, hippy crack, buzz bomb, balloons (nitrous oxide).

What is it?

Inhalants are depressant drugs that slow down the central nervous system particularly the breathing and heart rate. Most inhalants are readily available and found in many households. They comprise of three main categories including:

Volatile solvents - which are substances that change rapidly from liquid or semisolid state to a gas when exposed to air and include:

- Petrol
- Paint thinner and remover
- Spray paint
- Hair spray
- Deodorants
- Air fresheners
- Lighter fuels
- Propellant gases (used in aerosols)

Nitrites

- Amyl nitrate which is often used to enhance sexual experiences;
- Nitrous oxide is a colourless gas that is commonly used for sedation and pain relief (i.e. childbirth and dentistry) and but has also become popular among young people and those in the dance scene.

Gases – (i.e Ether or Chloroform) were previously used as anaesthetics.

What do they look like?

Most inhalants look like common household products. Amyl nitrate comes in small 10ml or 30ml bottles in various brands including Rush, Jungle Juice (Premium and Platinum) and Amsterdam. Nitrous oxide when used recreationally is usually found in cream charger bulbs which are sold in supermarkets, convenience stores and on-line.

How are inhalants usually taken?

Inhalants are 'sniffed' and the vapour or fumes are quickly inhaled through the lungs and carried to the brain providing an instant 'high'. Most inhalants are inhaled directly from the container or sprayed onto a cloth, and then inhaled.

Immediate effects of inhalants

What inhalants do to a person depends on how much is used and what type of inhalant is used -volatile solvents and amyl nitrate are more toxic to the brain and body than nitrous oxide. Many of the immediate effects of using inhalants are similar to those of alcohol, and may include:

- Slurred speech
- Blurred vision
- Dizziness
- Nausea
- Euphoria
- Loss of coordination

Other effects can include:

- Irritation of the eyes and throat
- Hallucinations
- Loss of memory
- Headaches
- Nose bleeds

Long-term effects

There is not a lot of research on the long-term effects of many inhalants – although some inhalants such as cleaning products, correction fluid, aerosol sprays and petrol can cause permanent damage, especially if people use them heavily for a long period of time.

Potential long-term problems may include:

- Brain damage affecting coordination, movement and memory
- Weight loss
- Fatigue and tremors
- Paranoia, hostility and depression
- Social and psychological delays in development



Mixing inhalants with other drugs

The chances of experiencing an overdose are increased if inhalants are taken in combination with other depressant drugs such as alcohol, benzodiazepines or opiates. Combining amyl nitrate and Viagra is particularly problematic and may cause loss of consciousness and, in extreme cases death.

Other things to consider about inhalants

- If a plastic bag is used to inhale substances, there may be increased risk of suffocation;
- Amyl nitrate causes people to lose their inhibitions and can result in risky choices around sex;
- Amyl nitrate causes people's immune response to dip immediately after inhaling it and stays suppressed for about 96 hours;
- Chronic use of petrol may cause irreversible brain damage;
- Using inhalants when pregnant may increase the risk of miscarriage, premature birth, birth defects and sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS);
- It is dangerous to drive or operate machinery while under the influence of inhalants;
- Sudden sniffing death (SSD) while rare can happen when people use aerosol inhalants. It is believed that chemicals in these inhalants can cause the heart to stop, particularly if the user is stressed, startled or does heavy exercise after inhaling;
- The temperature of the nitrous oxide in tanks and whippets is intensely cold (-40 degrees Celsius);
- Nitrous oxide can cause Vitamin B12 depletion (long-term depletion causes brain and nerve damage – risks higher for women/vegetarians);
- Most deaths associated with volatile solvents have resulted from sudden cardiac arrest.

Harm reduction advice for inhalants

- Try not use inhalants alone or in dangerous or isolated places (i.e. roads, canals and other bodies of water);
- Make sure you have mates around who can help if things go wrong;
- Make sure you are sitting down surrounded by soft ground;
- Don't use plastic bags, instead use paper bags or spray into a drink bottle or other container;
- Smaller bags are better than large ones, to reduce the risk of suffocation;
- Don't smoke while sniffing as many inhalants are highly flammable;
- If using aerosol cans, turn the can upside before spraying into the bag to reduce inhaling other poisons – this will not reduce the intoxication effect;
- Make sure the space you are using in is well ventilated ;
- Avoid exercise immediately after using inhalants;
- Try not to mix inhalants with other drugs (especially amyl and Viagra) as this increases the risks of things going wrong;
- If inhaling nitrous oxide, do not inhale directly from tanks or whippets - use a balloon to minimise the effects of frostbite to the nose, lips, and throat (including vocal cords);
- Try not to use more than 5 nitrous oxide balloons per session and leave several minutes between taking another hit;
- If you are experiencing persistent numbness, tingling or weakness in your fingers, hands and feet stop using and go see a doctor;
- If somebody becomes unwell after using inhalants seek medical attention immediately.