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# Be a Piece of the Puzzle ~ The Science of Drugs: Inhalants



Most people think harmful drugs are only found on street corners or in local pharmacies, not cleaning cabinets or garages. But sometimes items commonly found in millions of homes aren't used for their intended purposes such as permanent markers or compressed air. Some people inhale the chemical vapors produced by common household substances — known as inhalants — to get high. What many of them don't realize is how dangerous this really is.

## Why People Use Inhalants

Inhalants might seem like an alternative to other mood-altering drugs because they are cheap, can be purchased legally, and are easy to obtain. But that doesn't make them safer. When used as directed, household products are safe for cleaning, painting, and the other things they're meant to do. But as inhalants, they can be deadlier than street drugs.

## How Are They Used

These products are sniffed, snorted, bagged (fumes inhaled from a plastic bag), or "huffed" (inhalant-soaked rag, sock, or roll of toilet paper in the mouth) to achieve a high. Inhalants are also sniffed directly from the container.

## Different Kinds of Inhalants

There are four main types of inhalants: volatile solvents, gases, aerosols, and nitrites. Volatile solvents, gases, and aerosols can alter moods and create a high. Nitrites are believed to create sexual stimulation and enhancement.

Here is what else you need to

know about the types of inhalants:

- Volatile solvents are liquids that become a gas at room temperature. Some examples are paint thinners and removers, gasoline, glues, and felt-tip marker fluids.
- Gases include medical gases (ether, nitrous oxide) and household or commercial products (butane lighters, propane tanks, whipped cream dispensers that contain nitrous oxide, and refrigerants).
- Aerosol sprays are some of the most prevalent inhalants in the home and include spray paint, deodorant and hairsprays, vegetable oil cooking sprays, and static cling sprays.
- Nitrites include cyclohexyl nitrite, amyl nitrite, and butyl nitrite. On the street, they're called "poppers" or "snappers." They're found in some room deodorizers and capsules that release vapors when opened.

## Effects on the Body

People inhale chemical vapors in several ways, including sniffing, snorting, or spraying the inhalant directly into the nose or mouth, putting it into a bag or other container and then inhaling from there, putting the vapor onto a rag, or inhaling nitrous oxide from balloons. Because the high from inhalants only lasts a few minutes, some people may inhale over and over again for long periods of time to maintain the high, increasing the amount of dangerous chemicals entering and damaging the body.

Inhalants can cause many changes in the body. Once the vapors enter the body, some are absorbed by parts of the brain and nervous system. All of the inhalants (except nitrites) slow down the body's functions, similar

to the effects of drinking alcohol. At first someone gets excited, but then gets tired, has trouble speaking clearly or walking well, gets dizzy, loses inhibitions, and may get agitated. It can sometimes take up to 2 weeks for the chemical to completely pass from the body.

Other short-term effects of inhaling chemicals include:

- increased heart rate
- hallucinations or delusions
- losing feeling or consciousness
- nausea and vomiting
- loss of coordination
- slurred speech

Because inhalants are found in most homes, people don't realize they are incredibly addictive. People who become addicted to using inhalants are likely to become long-term users. This puts them at risk for these health problems:

- brain damage (toxic chemicals may make people become slow or clumsy, have trouble solving problems or planning ahead, suffer from memory loss, or become unable to learn new things)
- muscle weakness
- depression
- headaches and nosebleeds
- loss of sense of smell or hearing

Nitrites work differently. Instead of slowing down the brain and the spinal cord, they increase the size of blood vessels and relax the muscles.

## How Inhalants Kill

Like most street drugs, inhalants can be deadly. Someone can die from abusing inhalants after trying it only once. Causes of death include:

- "Sudden Sniffing Death" — This is the most common cause of death from inhalant use. The heart beats quickly and irregularly, and then suddenly stops (cardiac arrest). This can happen even the first time a person tries an inhalant and is experimenting.
- Asphyxia — Toxic fumes replace

oxygen in the lungs so that a person stops breathing.

- Choking — A user can choke on his or her vomit.
- Suffocation — When vapors are inhaled from a plastic bag placed over the head, the bag can block air from entering the lungs.
- Injuries — Since people high on inhalants often make poor decisions, they might try to drive under the influence or do something irrational, such as jump off a roof. They could also get burned or start explosions if a spark ignites flammable inhalants.
- Suicide — Some people become depressed when their high wears off.

## Signs of Inhalant Abuse

Inhalants, like other drugs, have noticeable effects on those using them. Someone on inhalants may suffer from a number of different ill effects, including:

- mood swings
- extreme anger, agitation, and irritability
- exhaustion
- loss of appetite
- frequent vomiting
- hallucinations and illusions
- facial rashes and blisters
- frequent runny nose and cough
- dilated pupils
- glazed or watery eyes
- extremely bad breath

Of course, some of these things are signs of other health problems, not necessarily inhalant use. But an even greater factor is why individuals use inhalant to get high. The common misconception by people is that these are "safer" due to their not being illegal. Unfortunately, what is seen as a "thing that kids do" can turn into a pattern of practice that leads into the abuse of other drugs: over the counter, illegal or prescription.

Resources:  
<http://teenshealth.org/teen/>  
<http://www.drugfree.org/>

## Great American Bash Concert July 4th

Jesse Cain

July 4th Parade: 6 pm

Concert

Ticket Booth

Gate Opens: 5:00 pm

Concert: 7:30 pm

Fireworks at Dusk

@ Vernonia Sport Fields

Food Vendors available

Contact: DeAnna Pearl

(503) 369-7370

Or

vernonia4thofjuly@googlegroups.com

Family Friendly Event

Tickets: \$5 Individual

\$10 Per family

ALL monies collected go to Vernonia Prevention Coalition programming. Thanks for Your Support!

Sponsors for 2013 Great American Bash

Vernonia Prevention Coalition

Vernonia Rural Fire Department

## Spencer Health and Wellness School Based Health Center

open Tuesdays and Fridays from 7:30 AM - 1:30 PM

### Summer Meal Program

"Follow the Pin Wheels to Free Summer Meals!"

Vernonia Community Church

State and A Street

Join Us for Lunch

11:30

1-18yr Eat Free

Adults \$2.00

June 17th

— Aug. 16th

Questions? Please contact:

Nic Welch (503) 369-6734

Volunteers Needed

USDA and the State of Oregon are equal opportunity Providers and employers