

# Fact Sheet

## Inhalants

### What are inhalants?

Inhalants are a range of products which, when vaporised and inhaled, may cause the person to feel intoxicated or 'high'. Many of the products used as inhalants are known as 'volatile substances' because they include aerosol and gas fuels, as well as glues and other forms of solvents.

Like alcohol, inhalants are depressants. This does not mean they make the person feel depressed. Rather, they slow down the activity between the brain and the body.

### Other common names

**Substances:** glue, gas, sniff, huff, poppers.

**Methods:** chroming, spraying, bagging, huffing, nanging, popping.

### Effects of using inhalants

Effects vary from person to person. They will depend on the size, weight and health of the person using the inhalant, the type and quantity of the substance used, and the method of use.

The effects of inhalants may start to be felt immediately and can last for up to 45 minutes. A sustained 'high' may be achieved by repeated use.

There is no safe level of drug use. Use of any drug always carries some risk and can produce unwanted side effects.

### Low to moderate doses

Small amounts of inhalants can affect a person quickly due to their rapid entry into the bloodstream through the lungs. Some of the immediate and short-term effects include:

- › feeling 'high' with less inhibitions
- › mood change and increased confidence, which can lead to risky behaviour
- › excitement, sometimes quickly followed by drowsiness
- › sneezing, coughing, glazed eyes and a runny nose
- › nausea and diarrhoea
- › unpleasant breath
- › nosebleeds, bloodshot eyes and sores around the nose and mouth
- › hallucinations
- › blackouts, convulsions and coma.

After-effects, such as hangovers and headaches, can last for several days and may occur after the immediate effects have passed.

### Higher doses

If large amounts of inhalants are used, the person may become disoriented and lose their coordination. Other effects can include visual distortions and passing out.

### Short-term use

Some people who sniff glue have been admitted to hospital unable to control their movements or speak properly, and having convulsions. Some people also experience problems with their breathing. Most of these symptoms usually subside within a few hours and rarely cause permanent damage.

### Long-term effects

The long-term effects of inhalant use can include:

- › **Appearance:** paleness, tremors, weight loss, tiredness, chapped lips (unusually thirsty). Some inhalants affect the production of blood and can cause anaemia. Inhalants (chroming in particular) can also cause eye problems – blood vessels can burst in the eyes, making them completely red and eventually leading to blindness.
- › **Brain damage:** a build-up of chemicals (such as the lead in petrol) in the body can cause damage to the brain, nervous system, kidneys and liver, and can irritate the lining of the stomach and intestines. Prolonged and heavy use can cause a coma, breathing problems, irregular heart beat and seizures.
- › **Impaired thinking:** forgetfulness and confusion.
- › **Psychological impairment:** irritability, hostile nature, depression and feelings of persecution.

### Permanent effects

Most long-term effects are not permanent and can be reversed if inhalant use is stopped. However, inhalation of cleaning products, correction fluid and aerosol sprays can cause permanent damage.

Permanent brain damage is rare, but can occur if the person uses inhalants for a long period of time. Drinking alcohol and using inhalants can further increase the damage to the body.

A small number of people have died from using inhalants. The main danger comes from accidents when intoxicated, such as suffocation by the plastic bags used to inhale, choking on vomit when unconscious, and reckless behaviour. Although rare, 'sudden sniffing death' has also been known to follow the use of some inhalants.

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## Tolerance and dependence

People who regularly use inhalants can develop a tolerance to them, so that they need larger amounts to produce the same effects.

Evidence suggests that long-term use of inhalants can lead to dependence. People who are dependent on inhalants find that using them becomes far more important than other activities in their life. They crave inhalants and find it difficult to stop using them. Some people may find they feel an urge to use them when they are in specific surroundings or socialising with friends.

## Withdrawal

Abruptly stopping use can cause withdrawal symptoms such as depression, anxiety, loss of appetite, irritation, aggressive behaviour, dizziness, tremors and nausea.

## Minimising the harms

Although using inhalants is not advisable, to reduce the risks it is a good idea to:

- › know which inhalants are more harmful than others
- › not to sniff alone or in dangerous places
- › not to put plastic bags over your head
- › use smaller bags to reduce the risk of suffocation
- › not to smoke around inhalants as they are flammable
- › avoid alcohol or other drugs while intoxicated with inhalants as this increases the chance of accidents and overdose
- › dial 000 in an emergency.

## Getting help

If your use of inhalants is affecting your health, family, relationships, work, school, financial or other life situation, you should seek help.

**A good place to start is with your local doctor** who is likely to know your medical history. Your doctor can give you information, a referral to a treatment service and ongoing treatment after specialist treatment is completed.

**Another option is self-referral.** Many treatment services allow this and you can contact them directly.

### Further information

The DrugInfo website ([www.druginfo.adf.org.au](http://www.druginfo.adf.org.au)) has information on:

- › Support services in your state or territory
- › Treatment options.

The Australian Drug Information Network website ([www.adin.com.au](http://www.adin.com.au)) has further information about self-referral treatment services.

The National Inhalants Information Service ([www.inhalantsinfo.org.au](http://www.inhalantsinfo.org.au)) has a large amount of inhalant-specific information.



[druginfo.adf.org.au](http://druginfo.adf.org.au)



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