



# INHALANTS

## About inhalants

Inhalants, or volatile solvents, are household, industrial or medical products. Inhaling the vapours from these products can make you feel intoxicated or 'high'. Inhalants are depressants which slow down the activity of the brain and its connections (often called the 'central nervous system'). The effect can be immediate and may last for several hours depending on the substance, the amount used and the method of inhalation. Some of the most common inhalants are chrome-based paint ('chroming') aerosol spray cans, glue, gas from lighters or barbecues (butane), petrol, paint, paint thinner and felt-tipped pens.

## Effects on pregnancy

Inhalants contain many toxic substances which are harmful to both you and your baby. It is believed that nearly all inhalants cross the placenta and enter the baby's blood stream. For this reason, it is important you stop using inhalants during pregnancy.

Research into this area is limited but some of the known effects on the baby are:

- » premature labour and birth
- » poor growth during pregnancy
- » low birth weight
- » poor growth in childhood
- » reduced oxygen, which can effect brain development.  
This has the potential to impact on a child's life long learning ability.

## Counselling in pregnancy

Pregnancy can be a good motivator to stop using inhalants. Drug and alcohol counselling can help you understand the reasons why you are using inhalants and help you to stop during pregnancy. A counsellor can also link you to appropriate support services such as outpatient or residential drug and alcohol services.

## Pregnancy care

You may find it hard to talk to health professionals about your use of inhalants but it's very important to do so early in the pregnancy. Getting information and advice in early pregnancy can help you have a healthy pregnancy and baby.

If there is concern about your baby's growth and wellbeing, your doctor or midwife will organise an ultrasound and for the baby to be monitored.

It is common for pregnant women to have some nausea, vomiting and constipation, if you are worried though, talk to your midwife or doctor about what you can do.

A healthy diet is always important but even more so when you are pregnant and breastfeeding. If you are concerned about your diet, ask to see a dietitian who will work with you to make improvements if you need to. Even with good eating habits you may still need supplements such as iron, calcium and other vitamins. All women are encouraged to take folate before conceiving and for at least the first three months of their pregnancy.

Always get advice from your doctor, midwife or dietitian before taking supplements.

## Breastfeeding

The effects of inhalants during breastfeeding have not been fully researched. Whilst major quantities of inhalants probably do not pass through breast milk, breast feeding whilst affected by inhalants is not safe and not recommended.

## Your baby's care after the birth

After the birth a doctor will check your baby.

Babies who have been exposed to inhalants in pregnancy can show signs of withdrawal such as excessive and high-pitched crying, sleeplessness, tremors, poor feeding and 'floppiness' of the muscles. This is called Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS). Babies may also have a characteristic smell following birth, which is caused by the inhalants coming out through the breath of the baby (from the lungs).

Most babies will show some signs of withdrawal and will need to stay in hospital for at least five days for observation. These can vary from mild withdrawal symptoms, which can be managed by supportive care such as cuddling, a quiet environment and using pacifiers, to more marked symptoms, which require medication and will need specialised care in the Newborn Intensive and Special Care unit.

Using inhalants while you are caring for your baby may affect your ability to parent and may put your baby at risk of accidents.

Ask for information about NAS before your baby is born or discuss NAS with your doctor or midwife. This will help you to understand how your baby will be assessed for NAS and how you can help your

## Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) and sleeping accidents

Research has identified several ways to care for your baby that will reduce the risk of sudden and unexpected infant death, including Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) and fatal sleeping accidents.

If you are smoking, using drugs, alcohol or medicines that make you feel drowsy, sleeping with your baby is dangerous. Anything that makes you sleep deeply will make it hard for you to respond properly to your baby's needs. You may also be less aware of where your baby is in your bed and any dangerous positions your baby may be in. These things greatly increase the risk of your baby dying suddenly.

It is important that a baby is in a smoke free environment at all times, sleeps in their own cot (never on the couch), lies on their back without their face or head covered with their feet touching the bottom of the cot, which makes wriggling under the blankets less likely.

For more information, speak with your midwife or doctor or contact SIDS and Kids by phone 1300 308 307 for the cost of a local call – or visit the SIDS and Kids website [www.sidsandkids.org](http://www.sidsandkids.org)

## For more information

### On the Women's website

[www.thewomens.org.au/wm-pregnancy-drugs-alcohol](http://www.thewomens.org.au/wm-pregnancy-drugs-alcohol)

### Women's Alcohol and Drug Service

Royal Women's Hospital  
8.30am–5.30pm Monday to Friday  
Tel: (03) 8345 3931  
Email: [wads@thewomens.org.au](mailto:wads@thewomens.org.au)

### DirectLine

DirectLine is part of Turning Point's state-wide telephone service network, providing 24-hour, seven day counselling, information and referral to alcohol and drug treatment and support services throughout Victoria. DirectLine is a free, anonymous and confidential service. | Tel: 1800 888 236

### Quit

Visit this website to help you quit or help you find out more about how smoking harms you.  
Tel: 137848 | [www.quit.org.au](http://www.quit.org.au)

### SIDS and Kids

Tel: 1300 308 307 | [www.sidsandkids.org](http://www.sidsandkids.org)