

Inhalants

What are inhalants?

Inhalants are common household, industrial and medical products that produce vapours, which some people inhale (breath in) to make them feel intoxicated or 'high'.

Some common inhalants include:

- Aerosol spray
- Chrome-based paint
- Paint and paint thinner
- Felt-tipped pens
- **Correction fluid (e.g. 'Liquid Paper')**
- Gas from lighters or barbecues (butane)
- Cleaning fluid
- Glue
- Petrol
- Nitrous oxide

Other names

Glue, gas, gasoline, sniff, huff, chroming, poppers.

How are they used?

Inhalants are breathed in through the nose or mouth.

They may be sprayed into a plastic bag, poured into a bottle or soaked onto a cloth or sleeve before being inhaled.

Sometime they are inhaled directly from the container or are sprayed directly into the mouth or nose. This method is very dangerous because it can cause suffocation.

Effects of inhalants

There is no safe level of drug use. Use of any drug always carries some risk. It's important to be careful when taking any type of drug.

Inhalants affect everyone differently, based on:

- Size, weight and health
- Whether the person is used to taking it
- Whether other drugs are taken around the same time
- The amount taken
- The strength of the drug

Inhaling aerosol sprays, cleaning and correction fluids, and model aeroplane cement has been known to cause sudden death.

The following effects may be experienced immediately and can last for around 45 minutes:

- **Initial 'rush' or 'high'**
- Feeling relaxed and happy, lowered inhibitions
- Spontaneous laughter and excitement
- Slurred speech and reduced coordination
- Confusion and disorientation
- Blurred vision and bloodshot or glazed eyes
- Bad breath
- Sneezing, runny nose and nosebleeds
- Agitation and aggression
- Headaches
- Drowsiness

Overdose

If the substance is inhaled many times or a particularly strong inhalant is used, it could cause an overdose. If any of the following effects are experienced an ambulance should be called straight away by dialling triple zero (000). Ambulance officers don't need to involve the police.

- Nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea
- Irregular heartbeat
- Chest pain
- Hallucinations
- Blackout, seizures and coma

Sudden sniffing death

Inhaling aerosol sprays, cleaning and correction fluids, and model aeroplane cement has been known to cause sudden death. It is believed that chemicals in these products can cause heart failure, particularly if the person is stressed or does heavy exercise after inhaling. This is very rare.

Low aromatic fuels

Unleaded petrol has been replaced by low aromatic fuels such as 'Opal' in some rural and remote communities in Australia. Sniffing low aromatic fuels does not produce a 'high', but can still cause damage to a person's health including death.

Coming down

In the days after inhalant use, the following may be experienced:

- Headache
- Nausea
- Dizziness
- Drowsiness
- Mental numbness

Long-term effects

Regular use of inhalants may eventually cause:

- Irritability and depression
- Memory loss
- Reduced attention span and ability to think clearly
- Pimples around the mouth and lips

- Pale appearance
- Tremors
- Weight loss
- Tiredness
- Excessive thirst
- Loss of sense of smell and hearing
- Problems with blood production, which may result in anaemia, irregular heartbeat, heart muscle damage
- Chest pain and angina
- Indigestion and stomach ulcers
- Liver and kidney damage
- Needing to use more to get the same effect
- Dependence on inhalants
- Financial, work and social problems

Most of these long-term effects can be reversed if use is stopped. However, some inhalants, such as cleaning products, correction fluid, aerosol sprays and petrol can cause permanent damage.

Some chemicals can build up in the body and damage the stomach, intestines, brain, nervous system, kidneys and liver.

Using inhalants with other drugs

The effects of taking inhalants with other drugs – including over-the-counter or prescribed medications – can be unpredictable and dangerous, and could include:

Inhalants + alcohol, benzodiazepines or opiates: enormous strain on the body, and can affect breathing rate and may increase the risk of passing out and suffocating or choking on vomit.

Withdrawal

Giving up inhalants after using them for a long time is challenging because the body has to get used to functioning without them. Withdrawal symptoms usually start 24-48 hours after the last use, and may last for 2 to 5 days. These symptoms can include:

- Hangover
- Headache, nausea and stomach pain
- Tiredness, shakiness, tremors
- Cramps
- Hallucinations and visual disorders, such as seeing spots

Further Information

The Druginfo website has information on:

- Help & support services
- Treatment
- Withdrawal
- References for this fact sheet

Go to druginfo.adf.org.au

These fact sheets
are funded by



Factsheet

Stay Informed

twitter.com/AustDrug
[linkedin.com/company/australian-drug-foundation](https://www.linkedin.com/company/australian-drug-foundation)
[facebook.com/AustralianDrugFoundation](https://www.facebook.com/AustralianDrugFoundation)
grogwatch.adf.org.au
adf.org.au/subscribe

Level 12, 607 Bourke Street, Melbourne
PO Box 818 North Melbourne Victoria Australia 3051

Email druginfo@adf.org.au Telephone **1300 85 85 84**

© The Australian Drug Foundation, 2016. ABN 66 057 731 192. This fact sheet offers general information only. The Australian Drug Foundation recommends that you obtain professional advice based on your individual circumstances before acting on information in this fact sheet.

Inhalants

Page 4/4

A Um201*