

Inhalant Use & Abuse Information



What are Inhalant's?

Inhalants are volatile substances or fumes from products such as glue or paint thinner that are sniffed or "huffed" to cause a high. Inhalants affect the brain with great speed and force and keep oxygen from reaching the lungs. Animal and human research shows that most inhalants are extremely toxic. Perhaps the most significant toxic effect of chronic exposure to inhalants is widespread and long-lasting damage to the brain and other parts of the nervous system. The intoxication produced by inhalants usually lasts just a few minutes; therefore, users often try to extend the "high" by continuing to inhale repeatedly over several hours, which increases the risk.

In addition to these physical and mental health problems, recent research shows that inhalant use is associated with symptoms of depression. Between 2004 and 2006, an estimated 218,000 youths aged 12-17 used inhalants and also experienced depression in the past year. The same research showed that depressed teens were more than three times as likely to start using inhalants than teens with no symptoms of depression. The reverse is also true, showing that teens often started using inhalants before depression began.

Physical Effects

Slurred speech / Lack of coordination / Dizziness / Lightheadedness / Hallucinations / Delusions / Loss in control / Lingering headache / Confusion / Nausea or vomiting / Hypoxia (suffocation, asphyxiation) leading to brain or other organ damage / Muscle spasms and tremors / Addiction / Liver, lung, and kidney problems / Muscle weakness.

Prolonged abuse can negatively affect a person's cognition, movement, vision, and hearing / Fatal injuries from falls / Death from choking on vomit / Heart attack from irregular or rapid heart beat / "Sudden sniffing death" (heart failure and immediate death, even with first time use)

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Names & Street Terms

Whippets, poppers, snappers, air blast, moon gas, oz, poor man's pot, bolt, boppers, bullet rush, noz, satan's secret, buzz bomb, shoot the breeze, snotballs, Texas shoe shine, highball, thrust, hippie crack, toilet water, huff, toncho, laughing gas, locker room, and more.

Warning Signs

Common inhalant abuse warning signs include:

- Glassy
- Glazed or watery eyes
- Behavioral/mood changes
- Slurred speech
- Loss of appetite
- Problems in school
- Excitability or irritability

In addition, however, there are material signs that parents should be aware of. These include: chemical odors on the breath or clothing, signs of paint or other products on the face or fingers (including typewriter correction fluid used as nail polish), spots or sores around the nose or mouth, gasoline- or paint-soaked rags in a child's room, used spray paint cans in a child's room or other peculiar location, empty or partially-filled butane cigarette lighters, and missing household products. The materials signs are important to note because many of the physical symptoms may not last very long.

What should a parent do if they suspect use by their child?

Seek professional advice immediately. Call your family physician, a school nurse, counselor or the poison control center to discuss specific concerns and how to best broach the subject with your child. But even before you notice a potential warning sign, talk to your child about the safe and proper use of household products and the dangers of Inhalant Abuse.