

Inhalant Abuse

Inhalant Abuse – What is It?

Inhalant Abuse is the deliberate inhalation by “sniffing” or “huffing” fumes, vapors, or gases from common household and commercial products for the purpose of “getting high.”

Prevalence of Inhalant Abuse in the United States

- Over 2.6 million children, aged 12 – 17, use an Inhalant each year to get high.
- 1 in 4 students in America has intentionally abused a common household product to get high by the time they reach the eighth grade.
- Inhalants tend to be the drug that is tried first by children.
- “Sniffing” and “huffing” can begin at age 10 or younger.
- 59% of children are aware of friends huffing at age 12.
- Inhalants are the fourth most-abused substance after alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana.
- The number of lives claimed by Inhalant Abuse each year is unknown because these deaths often are attributed to other causes.
 - Initial use of inhalants often starts early. Some young people may use inhalants as an easily accessible substitute for alcohol. Research suggests that chronic or long-term inhalant abusers are among the most difficult drug abuse patients to treat. Many suffer from cognitive impairment and other neurological dysfunction and may experience multiple psychological and social problems.

What kinds of products are abused by young people?

- More than 1,400 common household and commercial products are used for the purpose of “getting high.”
- Most products used as Inhalants are inexpensive, legal, and readily available in the home, garage, office, school, or in the local convenience store.
- Products include: computer cleaner, air conditioning coolant, gasoline, felt tip markers, spray paint, air freshener, butane, cooking spray, paint, glue, and hundreds more.

Inhalants fall into the following categories:

Solvents

- Industrial or household solvents or solvent-containing products, including paint thinners or removers, degreasers, dry-cleaning fluids, gasoline, and glue
- Art or office supply solvents, including correction fluids, felt-tip-marker fluid, and electronic contact cleaners

Gases

- Gases used in household or commercial products, including butane lighters and propane tanks, whipped cream aerosols or dispensers (whippets), and refrigerant gases
- Household aerosol propellants and associated solvents in items such as spray paints, hair or deodorant sprays, fabric protector sprays, and aerosol computer cleaning products
- Medical anesthetic gases, such as ether, chloroform, halothane, and nitrous oxide (“laughing gas”)

Nitrites

- Organic nitrites are volatiles that include cyclohexyl, butyl, and amyl nitrites, and are commonly known as “poppers.” Amyl nitrite is still used for medical purposes. Volatile nitrites are often sold in small brown bottles and labeled as “video head cleaner,” “room odorizer,” “leather cleaner,” or “liquid aroma.”

Health Hazards

- Children can die anytime they abuse an Inhalant — including the first time — through Sudden Sniffing Death Syndrome, suffocation, choking, or a fatal injury.
 - Sniffing highly concentrated amounts of the chemicals in solvents or aerosol sprays can directly induce heart failure and death within minutes of a session of repeated inhalations. This syndrome, known as “sudden sniffing death,” can result from a single session of inhalant use by an otherwise healthy young person. Sudden sniffing death is particularly associated with the abuse of butane, propane, and chemicals in aerosols.
- Inhalant Abuse can damage the brain and other vital organs, such as the heart, kidneys and liver, causing brain damage or other severe physical impairments.
- High concentrations of inhalants also can cause death from suffocation by displacing oxygen in the lungs and then in the central nervous system so that breathing ceases.
- Deliberately inhaling from a paper or plastic bag or in a closed area greatly increases the chances of suffocation.
- Even when using aerosols or volatile products for their legitimate purposes (i.e., painting, cleaning), it is wise to do so in a well-ventilated room or outdoors.
- Chronic abuse of solvents can cause severe, long-term damage to the brain, the liver, and the kidneys.
- Inhalants can be addictive and children may progress to illegal drugs or alcohol abuse.

Harmful, irreversible effects that may be caused by abuse of specific solvents include:

- Hearing loss—toluene (spray paints, glues, dewaxers) and trichloroethylene (dry cleaning chemicals, correction fluids)
- Peripheral neuropathies, or limb spasms—hexane (glues, gasoline) and nitrous oxide (whipped cream dispensers, gas cylinders)
- Central nervous system or brain damage—toluene (spray paints, glues, dewaxers)
- Bone marrow damage—benzene (gasoline)

Serious, but potentially reversible, effects include:

- Liver and kidney damage—toluene-containing substances and chlorinated hydrocarbons (correction fluids, dry cleaning fluids)
- Blood oxygen depletion—aliphatic nitrites (known on the street as poppers, bold, and rush) and methylene chloride (varnish removers, paint thinners)