

Inhalants

Inhalants

Inhalants are common household products that, when abused, can cause permanent brain damage or death. About 1,000 products are misused for the purpose of altering mood or getting intoxication effects similar to alcohol. Children between the ages of 10 to 12 use inhalants the most. Abuse reaches its peak between 7th to 9th grades.

On the street, inhalants are known as “climax,” “locker room,” “poppers,” “rush” and “whippets,” among others. Ways to inhale include:

- sniffing or snorting: inhaling an open container through the nose
- huffing: inhaling a rag soaked in the substance through the mouth
- bagging: inhaling an open container or soaked rag from a bag placed over the head.

Contents of spray cans (aerosols) may also be sprayed directly into the nose or mouth. Inhalants cause the user to have feelings similar to being drunk. Alcohol-like effects include slurred speech, lack of coordination, euphoria and dizziness. Users may also see or hear things that do not exist (hallucinations) and start believing things that are not real (delusions).

Inhalants act directly on the central nervous system. Chemicals are quickly absorbed by the lungs and bloodstream. Effects on the brain are fast and last only a few minutes. Physical and mental damage caused by the chemicals can be permanent.

Inhalants can cause sudden death — even after the first use.

Types of Inhalants

- Volatile solvents are liquids that vaporize at room temperature. Common chemicals found in these products include toluene, benzene, methylene chloride, trichorethylene and propane.
 - Products include paint thinners and removers, dry cleaning fluids, degreasers, gasoline, glues, correction fluids, rubber cement, nail polish remover and felt-tip markers.
- Aerosols are sprays. Common chemicals found in these products include butane, propane and freon.
 - Products include spray paints, lighter fluid, deodorant, hair sprays, vegetable oil sprays and fabric protector sprays.
- Gases are used in medical anesthetics and in household and commercial products.
 - Products include laughing gas (nitrous oxide), ether, chloroform, butane lighters, propane tanks, refrigerants and whipped cream dispensers.
- Nitrates are used mainly as sexual enhancers. Common chemicals found in these products include cyclohexyl nitrate, amyl nitrate, butyl nitrate and nitrous oxide.
 - Products include video head cleaner, room odorizers and heart medicine (known as “poppers” or “snappers” on the street).

(over)

Addiction

A user can develop a tolerance, meaning he or she has to sniff or huff more chemicals and do it more often to get high. Withdrawal symptoms can occur when a user tries to stop inhaling. According to The National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), about 650,000 youths ages 12 to 17 had used inhalants in 2012.

Effects of Using Inhalants

Inhalants can cause the following effects.

■ Short-term:

- decreased breathing rate and blood pressure
- loss of sensation, unconsciousness
- anger or violent behavior, impaired judgment, dizziness, drowsiness, muscle weakness, headache
- increased heart rate, euphoria, giddy feelings, inability to coordinate movements
- fear, anxiety, apathy, depression.

■ Long-term:

- weight loss, muscle weakness, upset stomach (nausea), headaches
- lack of coordination, inattentiveness, hallucinations
- irritability, violent behavior, depression
- damage to the brain or other parts of the central nervous system (losing the ability to walk, talk or think; memory loss)
- damage to the heart, lungs, liver and kidneys.

Medical Problems (Complications)

Sniffing for long periods of time can cause irregular and rapid heart rhythms and lead to heart failure and death. Using an inhalant even once can cause sudden death, especially when using butane, propane and aerosol chemicals.

Death can also occur from inhaling fumes in the lungs (asphyxiation), lack of air (suffocation), choking (from inhaling vomit after inhalant use) or injury (accidents while high). Inhalant use during pregnancy can affect the baby's birth weight, skeleton growth and development.

Treatment

There is currently no medicine to treat inhalant addiction. The best available treatment is behavioral therapy. The user may have therapy as an outpatient or while staying at a health care facility if 24-hour supervision is needed to stop the use of inhalants. As part of therapy, the user may have:

- contingency management:
The user gets rewards for staying in treatment and remaining inhalant-free. Earning points for drug-free urine tests, the user can exchange the points for items that encourage healthy living.)
- cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT):
The user learns coping skills to help break the cycle. This type of therapy teaches the user to recognize the situations in which he or she is most likely to inhale, how to avoid those situations and how to cope with the problems that go with abuse.
- family involvement:
The family will learn how to monitor for future inhalant use and how to support the user's recovery from inhalant abuse.

**Information adapted from the
White House Office of National Drug
Control Policy, U.S. Department
of Health and Human Services,
the National Institute on Drug Abuse,
the U.S. Department of Justice.**