

Inhalants

What are inhalants?

Inhalants are substances that are sniffed to give the user an immediate 'high'. These substances are classified as depressants and are easily absorbed through the lungs and carried to the brain, where they act to slow down the central nervous system. There are four major categories of inhalants: volatile solvents, aerosols, nitrites and gases.

Nitrites are some of the more common inhalants. Nitrites have historically been used by people to enhance sexual experience. Amyl and butyl nitrite are the most popular. Amyl nitrite dilates blood vessels. It causes relaxation of almost all smooth (involuntary) muscles. These muscles control dilation of the blood vessels of the heart and the diameter of blood vessels and the iris of the eye. Some people use these drugs not for the mental effects, but because of their muscle-relaxing properties which makes anal sex easier and more pleasurable. Amyl is immuno-suppressive; a person's immune response dips immediately on inhaling amyl and stays down for about 96 hours.

Nitrous oxide or 'laughing gas' is the most popular anaesthetic inhalant and is often associated with the dance and rave scenes.

How many people use inhalants?

Australian general population

According to the 2010 National Household Survey use of inhalants among the Australian general population aged 14 years and above, is increasing. 3.8% have ever tried inhalants (which includes such substances as solvents, aerosols, glue, petrol, laughing gas, nitrous oxide and amyl nitrite), and 0.6% have used inhalants in the past year – a statistically significant increase over 2007 figures. Use among females increased significantly with 0.5% reporting recent use in 2010 compared with 0.2% in 2007.

Those aged 20-24 years had the highest proportion reporting use in the past 12 months (1.8%) compared to other age groups

Australian secondary school students

According to the 2008 Australian Secondary Students Alcohol and Drug Survey, 19% of students had ever used inhalants. Use was higher among younger students than older students, with 23% of 12 year olds having ever used inhalants compared to 14% of 17 year olds. The proportion of students who reported using inhalants in the past year was 13.5%; again, use was more common among younger students compared to older students, with 16% of 12 year olds having used inhalants in the past year compared to

Short term effects

The short term effects produced by using inhalants are similar to those of alcohol, such as slurred speech, blurred vision, dizziness, nausea, euphoria and loss of co-ordination. Other short term effects include irritation to eyes and throat, hallucinations, loss of memory, headaches and nose bleeds. Some, such as amyl nitrite, may lead to increased sensual awareness and create a loss of inhibitions.

Long term effects

There is limited research on the long term effects of inhalants. It is generally accepted that health problems may include possible brain damage affecting coordination, movement and memory, weight loss, fatigue and tremors, paranoia, hostility and depression, and social and psychological delays in development.

There are many serious effects for long term users of petrol. Chronic use may lead to irreversible brain damage. Lead poisoning is a major problem and can lead to liver, kidney and brain damage.

<http://www.aihw.gov.au/publication-detail/?id=32212254712>

<http://www.nationaldrugstrategy.gov.au/internet/drugstrategy/Publishing.nsf/content/school08>

