

Signs of Abuse

- Drunk or disoriented appearance
- Paint or other stains on face, hands, or clothing
- Hidden empty spray paint or solvent containers and chemical-soaked rags or clothing
- Slurred speech
- Strong chemical odors on breath or clothing
- Nausea or loss of appetite
- Red or runny nose
- Sores or rash around the nose or mouth

Source: National Institute on Drug Abuse, Research Report Series, *Inhalant Abuse*, 10 May 2001.

What are the effects?

For most users, inhalant abuse results in a rapid euphoric effect that is similar to alcohol intoxication. Users experience initial excitation, then drowsiness, lightheadedness, and agitation. Inhalant abusers also report feeling a loss of inhibitions. The chemicals found in volatile solvents, aerosols, and gases produce a variety of additional effects during or shortly after use that include dizziness, strong hallucinations, delusions, belligerence, apathy, and impaired judgment. Additional symptoms exhibited by long-term inhalant abusers include weight loss, muscle weakness, disorientation, inattentiveness, lack of coordination, irritability, and depression. Withdrawal symptoms include sweating, rapid pulse, hand tremors, insomnia, nausea or vomiting, hallucinations, and, in severe cases, grand mal seizures.

While abusers of other inhalants seek a euphoric effect, nitrite abusers--who tend to be adults rather than adolescents--seek to enhance the sexual experience. Inhaled nitrites dilate blood vessels, increase heart rate, and produce a sensation of heat and excitement that can last for several minutes. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, use of these drugs is associated with unsafe sexual practices that greatly increase the risk of contracting and spreading infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS and hepatitis.

Chronic inhalant abuse may result in serious and sometimes irreversible damage to the user's heart, liver, kidneys, lungs, and brain. Brain damage may result in personality changes, diminished cognitive functioning, memory impairment, and slurred speech.

Death from inhalant abuse can occur after a single use or after prolonged use. Sudden sniffing death (SSD) may result within minutes of inhalant abuse from irregular heart rhythm leading to heart failure. Other causes of death include asphyxiation, aspiration, or suffocation. A user who is suffering from impaired judgment may also experience fatal injuries from motor vehicle accidents or sudden falls.