



# INHALANTS: NOT A FAD – A DEADLY FACT

*Huffers Baggers Sniffers Spray heads...*

These are the names used to describe teens and people who are inhaling a variety of substances or fumes from products such as glue or paint thinner that are sniffed or “huffed” to cause an immediate high. Inhalants can cause sudden death. Inhalants can kill you instantly. Inhalant users can die by suffocation, choking on their vomit, or having a heart attack.

## WHAT ARE INHALANTS?

Inhalants are chemicals that cause a person to feel euphoric or high when they are breathed in through the nose or mouth. Inhalants are appealing because they are cheap and easy to find.

Often, the chemicals that are being inhaled are common household products like correction fluid, nail polish remover, lighter fluids, spray deodorant and even some felt tip markers. Because most inhalants are legal substances that anyone can buy, reducing their use is a complex problem.

## FACTS ABOUT INHALANTS

- There are about 100,000 new inhalant users each year.
- About 20 percent of all eighth graders have used inhalants.
- Inhalants can be huffed, sniffed, bagged or sprayed.

## WHAT HAPPENS WHEN SUBSTANCES ARE INHALED?

Inhalants starve the body of oxygen and force the heart to beat irregularly and more rapidly. The heart may begin to quiver rather than function as an efficient pump. Blood is not pumped effectively through the body, resulting in sudden death.

Inhalants damage other parts of your body. People who use inhalants can experience nausea and nosebleeds; develop liver, lung, and kidney problems; and lose their sense of hearing or smell. Chronic use can lead to muscle wasting and reduced muscle tone and strength.

Inhalant intoxication can develop within seconds to minutes and can last for hours with repeated use. When someone is high on inhalants, he/she may exhibit the same behavior as someone who is drunk. Some of the most common symptoms are loss of balance, giddiness, slurred speech, irritability, nausea, and drowsiness. Prolonged use of inhalants can cause disorientation, hallucinations and/or loss of consciousness.

## WHAT CAN HAPPEN TO CHRONIC INHALANT ABUSERS?

Chronic inhalant abuse causes serious long-term problems.

The chronic abuser may experience diminishing memory and reasoning abilities as well as problems with coordination and time. Chronic inhalant use also can increase the likelihood of death from accidents, suffocation or malfunction of the heart.



According to brain scan studies, some chronic abusers show deterioration of the part of the brain that affects muscle coordination and balance. In addition, chronic inhalant abusers may lose as many as 25 to 30 IQ points temporarily, or may suffer permanent brain damage.

Other risks associated with inhalant abuse include permanent damage to the liver, kidneys, heart, lungs and bone marrow. The inhalant abuser also risks death. Death from inhalant abuse often is referred to as Sudden Sniffer's Death. This occurs when the abuser's heart becomes sensitized to the body's own adrenaline. The surge of adrenaline and the hypersensitive condition of the heart create fatal heart rhythms that lead to death.

## SYMPTOMS OF INHALANT ABUSE

Studies have shown a connection between inhalant abuse and problems in school, such as failing grades, chronic absences and general indifference. There are other warning signs too, including:

### PHYSICAL EFFECTS:

- *Loss of appetite*
- *Spots or sores around nose or mouth*
- *Muscle or joint pain*
- *Drunk or dizzy appearance*
- *Red or runny eyes or nose*
- *Anxiety and/or irritability*
- *Drowsiness or fatigue*
- *Insomnia*
- *Chemical odors on clothing*
- *Indigestion or stomach problems*
- *Paint on hands or face*

### PERSONALITY CHANGES:

- *Noticeable change in eating and sleeping habits*
- *Doesn't participate in usual activities*
- *Loss of interest in school or work*
- *Always seems tired and lethargic*
- *Develops a negative attitude toward school, family and friends*

## MOST COMMONLY ABUSED INHALANTS

There are thousands of products in five categories that can be used and abused as inhalants. Following are some of the most commonly abused products.

### GASES:

- *Halon (in fire extinguishers)*
- *Helium (balloons)*
- *Nitrous oxide (in canned whipped topping)*
- *Freon refrigerants*
- *Butane cigarette lighters*

### ADHESIVES:

- *Airplane glue*
- *Rubber cement*
- *PVC cement*

### NITRITES:

- *Amyl nitrite (sold as prescription ampule for chest pain)*
- *Butyl nitrite (sold in small bottles as liquid incense)*



#### AEROSOLS:

- *Spray paints*
- *Computer and keyboard duster sprays*
- *Analgesic sprays*
- *Asthma sprays*
- *Air fresheners*
- *Vegetable cooking spray*
- *Fire extinguishers*
- *Fabric protectants*
- *Hair sprays*
- *Deodorant sprays*
- *Insecticides*

#### SOLVENTS:

- *Gasoline*
- *Kerosene*
- *Correction fluid*
- *Adhesives and glues*
- *Paint thinners*
- *Nail polish remover*
- *Spot removers*
- *Some felt tip markers*
- *Liquid shoe polish*

## HOW TO PREVENT INHALANT ABUSE

Inhalant abuse is a serious problem. It can lead to other forms of substance abuse and can be fatal. Education and prevention are the key elements in fighting inhalant abuse. Education must begin at home while children are still young because inhalant use often starts in elementary school. It is important that children understand the dangers of inhalants, especially the fact that they can kill them.

If you suspect an inhalant poisoning emergency, call the Poison Help line immediately at 1-800-222-1222.

Education is key to prevention. The Missouri Poison Center welcomes teachers, child care providers, scout leaders, EMS providers and other community educators to use these free resources to teach about poison safety.

**MISSOURI**  
POISON CENTER  
1-800-222-1222

**BE POISON SMART!** KEEP POISONOUS PRODUCTS  
OUT OF SIGHT & OUT OF REACH.

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