

THE BASICS

Inhalants

Do you know?

- Inhalants, including solvents and aerosols, are products that people inhale to get high. They are commonly known as “sniff.”
- Inhalants are in the class of drugs called sedative/hypnotic/anaesthetic. (Sedatives have a calming effect; hypnotics make you sleepy; anaesthetics cause loss of physical feeling and/or consciousness so pain can't be felt.)
- Inhalants evaporate easily and release chemical fumes.
- Over 1,400 products can be used as inhalants. Most of these are made from crude oil, also known as petroleum, including: gasoline, automotive fluids and various consumer products, such as lighter fluid, paints, varnishes and airplane glue.
- Inhalant abuse occurs when people inhale substances to get high instead of using them for their intended purpose.
- Inhalants are taken into the body by sniffing, snorting or by breathing them in through the mouth, which is called huffing.
 - Unlike most drugs or food, inhalants do not travel first through the digestive system or through the kidneys and liver where they can be filtered out of the blood. Once inhaled, fumes move quickly to affect the lungs, heart, bloodstream, central nervous system and brain.
 - This may explain why the effects are felt very quickly after inhaling.
 - It takes ten days for inhalants to clear out of the user's body. Repeated use means that these toxic chemicals can build up in the central nervous system and cause serious brain damage.

- Inhalant abuse is a common form of drug abuse around the world because inhalants are cheap, easy to get and produce an almost immediate high.

Most Severe Effect

The most severe effect of inhalant abuse is death, which can happen **after only one use**. Death can occur in these ways:

- “Sudden sniffing death,” which is thought to be caused by an irregular heartbeat resulting in a fatal heart attack, or
- breathing stops because the lungs can't get any oxygen due to suffocation from the plastic bag or choking on vomit.

Short-term Effects

While using a person may experience:

- a short high, from a few moments to half an hour, followed by a period of sleepiness
- muscle weakness, clumsiness and slowing of movements
- feeling dizzy, giddy
- headache and sensitivity to light
- chest and stomach pain
- slurring of speech, blurred vision, ringing in ears
- loss of appetite, nausea, throwing up, bad breath and drooling
- nosebleeds and sores on mouth and nose
- nervousness, disorientation
- aggressiveness, violent behaviour, loss of judgement
- hearing and seeing things that are not really there

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Long-term Effects

After heavy use over a long period of time, a person may experience:

- mood swings and personality changes
- lack of energy
- memory loss and attention, thinking and learning problems
- movement and coordination problems
- severe and permanent brain damage
- uncontrollable eye movements, loss of hearing and sense of smell
- nerve damage starting in the hands and feet
- severe damage to lungs, kidneys, liver, heart, blood, immune system and senses

Tolerance and Dependence

- Users can become psychologically dependent (they feel they need it) as well as physically dependent (the body needs it).
- Tolerance can develop with regular use, with more frequent and larger doses needed to get the same effect.

Withdrawal Symptoms

- Stopping regular, heavy use may result in:
 - anxiety, depression, irritability, aggressiveness
 - headaches, dizziness, tremors, nausea, loss of appetite
 - seeing and hearing things that aren't really there
- A medical professional should supervise withdrawal from inhalants.

Other Risks

- Using inhalants during pregnancy can have severe consequences for developing children. These effects are described as Fetal Solvent Syndrome and include:
 - low birth weight
 - facial and head deformities
 - damage to the brain and other organs (heart, kidneys)
 - mental and learning delays
 - behavioural problems
 - delays in walking and speech development

- Inhalants and solvents are dangerous to children and should be kept in a locked storage cabinet.
- Sale of inhalants for the purpose of getting high is illegal in Manitoba. Retailers who knowingly sell solvents for this purpose face serious legal consequences.
- People can put themselves in risky situations when on this drug (driving while impaired, having unprotected sex, taking unsafe actions which could cause injury).

REMEMBER: A person's experience with any drug can vary. Here are a few of the many things that may affect the experience: the amount and strength of the drug taken, the setting, a person's mood and expectations before taking the drug, gender, overall health, past experience with that drug and whether more than one drug is being used at the same time. Using alcohol and other drugs at the same time can be dangerous.

Sources and For More Information

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Inhalant Information (information sheet), Vancouver Island Health Authority.

Inhalants: The ABCs, AADAC, 2002.

Straight Facts about Drugs and Drug Abuse, Health Canada, 2000.

Street Drugs: A Drug Identification Guide, Publishers Group, LLC, Plymouth, MN, 2005.

For more information or for help with a drug or alcohol problem: Contact your local Addictions Foundation of Manitoba (AFM) office or visit the website at www.afm.mb.ca. AFM offers a broad range of prevention and rehabilitation services, including harm reduction and abstinence-based programs for alcohol, other drugs and gambling.

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