
Inhalants and your mental health

What are Inhalants?

- Inhalants are household or industrial products that can cause intoxication when inhaled.
- They are particularly dangerous as these products were never intended to be inhaled.
- Most inhalants are highly toxic and can quickly cause serious problems for your mental and physical health.
- Using inhalants (glue, gas, poppers) can also be called huffing, sniffing or chroming, although this last term specifically refers to the use of aerosol-based paint.

How do Inhalants affect you?

Inhalant use can cause:

- Difficulty in breathing.
- Dry sore throat and nose.
- Damage to your kidneys and liver.
- Disorientation and problems with your memory
- Hallucinations (see, hear, smell or feel things that are not there).
- Brain damage including permanent impairment of short-term memory and concentration.
- Sudden death.

Immediate effects of Chroming

- Excitement and euphoria.
- Less inhibition and increased risk-taking.
- Hallucinations and delusions.
- Bad breath.
- Nosebleeds, bloodshot eyes and sores.
- Agitation, uneasiness, confusion and disorientation.
- Headaches, drowsiness, slurred speech, loss of co-ordination.
- Nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea.
- Flu-like symptoms, e.g. sneezing and coughing.

- Chest pain and irregular heartbeat.
- Large amounts of inhalants may cause blackouts, convulsions or even coma.

Long-term Inhalant use

Regular long-term use of inhalants can result in multiple problems, including:

- Dependence.
- Sores or rashes around the mouth and nose.
- Tremors.
- Weight loss.
- Feeling unusually thirsty.
- Tiredness.
- Anaemia.
- Irregular heart beat and damage to the heart muscle.
- Irritation of the stomach lining and intestines.
- Liver and kidney damage.
- Loss of sense of smell or hearing.
- Burst blood vessels in the eyes leading to blindness.
- Decreased co-ordination, difficulty walking, memory impairment, attention difficulties and reduced ability to think clearly.
- Feelings of irritability, hostility and depression.

Sudden Sniffing Death Syndrome

Sudden Sniffing Death Syndrome can occur after using aerosol sprays. It doesn't matter if you are a new or experienced user. Your risk of death is even higher if you have a sudden shock or experience strong emotions when intoxicated.

Inhalants and your mental health

- Inhalants may make you experience hallucinations, paranoia and confusion.

- Inhalants may affect your memory and you may have difficulties thinking clearly.
- Inhalants may make you feel more depressed.
- Inhalants may increase your anxiety with a higher risk of panic attacks and confusion about reality and about yourself.

Inhalants and other drugs

All drugs interact with each other, including inhalants. It is not recommended you smoke tobacco or cannabis, or use stimulants (e.g. speed, coffee or cola), within twenty minutes of chroming.

Inhalants and pregnancy

Inhaling glues and aerosols during pregnancy can harm the baby and can result in premature birth.

Inhalants use and the law

Most inhalants are legal substances, but it is illegal for shopkeepers to sell inhalants if they believe they are going to be used for chroming.

What happens when you stop using Inhalants?

If you have been using inhalants regularly you may experience withdrawal symptoms when you stop.

Withdrawal symptoms can include:

- Anxiety
 - Depression
 - Loss of appetite
 - Nausea, dizziness and headaches
 - Irritation and aggressive behaviour
 - You may also experience tremors or shaking
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Reducing harm from Inhalants

There is no known safe ways to use inhalants – it is best not to use them at all if possible.

However, it is important to reduce the risks you are taking if you do use inhalants:

- It is safer to use paper bags than plastic bags to avoid suffocation.
- If using aerosol cans, turn the can upside down before spraying into the bag – this reduces the other poisons you inhale that do nothing for your high.
- Never put your mouth and nose inside the bag.
- Avoid smoking near the bag or while using any inhalants. Inhalants are flammable.
- Avoid exercise immediately after using inhalants, as this puts more strain on your body.
- Try not to use alone and be with at least one person who is straight.
- Try to use in a safe, quiet place where there is less risk of sudden events or shocks.

What if your friend passes out?

- Remove the bag from your friend's mouth.
- If the person is unconscious, check their airway is clear, place them on their side and into the recovery position.
- Call an ambulance on 000 and stay with them.
- If breathing has stopped, give mouth-to-mouth resuscitation.
- If there is no pulse, start applying CPR if you are trained.

Conclusion

Inhalants can worsen symptoms associated with mental illness and can cause sudden death.

Useful phone numbers

Emergency **000**
Direct Line **1800 888 236**
Drug Info **1300 858 584**
Moreland Hall (Northern Region) **03 9386 2876**
DAS West (Western Region) **03 8345 6682**
Voyage (Western Region) **03 9296 1228**
Hepatitis C Helpline **03 9349 1111**
Suicide Helpline **1300 651 251**
Smoking Quitline **13 18 48**
Family Drug Help **1300 660 068**

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SUMITT is a Victorian dual diagnosis service, providing direct clinical care, consultation and training on co-occurring substance use and mental illness.

www.dualdiagnosis.mh.org.au

