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 (whipped cream)
- Freon refrigerants
- Butane cigarette lighters

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

**Aerosols**
- Spray paints
- Analgesic sprays
- Asthma sprays
- Air fresheners
- Vegetable cooking spray
- Fire extinguishers
- Fabric protectants
- Hair sprays
- Deodorant sprays
- Insecticides

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

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**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 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 before they recognize that they can kill them.

If you suspect a poisoning emergency, call your local poison center immediately at 1-800-222-1222.

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**Inhalants: Not a Fad—a Deadly Fact**

Use Mr. Yuk to teach your children about poisons and how to contact your poison center.

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Illustrations by Elizabeth A. Kratting
Huffers Baggers Sniffers Spray heads

These are the names used to describe a growing number of teenagers who are inhaling a variety of potentially lethal substances.

The U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration reports that in any given month, 5 to 10 children from 12 to 17 years of age are experimenting with inhalants.

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.
- 10 to 20 percent of all eighth graders have used inhalants.
- Inhalants can be huffed, sniffed, bagged, or sprayed.

What happens when substances are inhaled?

When chemicals are inhaled, the essential organs of the body are poisoned.

Brain activity begins to slow down and the heart becomes more sensitive to certain chemicals like adrenaline. 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.

Inhalant toxicity 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 include loss of balance, dizziness, slurred speech, tremors, nausea, and drowsiness. Prolonged use of inhalants can cause disorientation, hallucinations, and/or loss of consciousness.

Paint thinner & glue

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 fine motor skills. Chronic inhalant use also can increase the likelihood of death from accident, suffocation, or malfunction of the heart.

According to brain scan studies, chronic abusers show deterioration of the part of the brain that regulates 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 hyperactive condition of the heart create fatal heart rhythms that lead to death.

Data from the American Association of Poison Control Centers reveal approximately 30 percent of all poisoning fatalities among 12 to 17-year-olds are due to the abuse of inhalants. Some experts believe that more deaths are related to inhalant use than to any other frequently used commonly abused substance.

Symptoms of Inhalant Abuse

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

Personality Changes
- Noticeably changes in eating and sleeping habits
- Doesn’t participate in usual activities
- Loses interest in school or work
- Always seems tired and lethargic
- Develops a negative attitude toward school, family, and friends

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