



# Mental Health Association of Northern Kentucky

A LEADER IN PROVIDING ADVOCACY, EDUCATION, AND SERVICES THAT PROMOTE MENTAL WELLNESS

EDUCATION AND SCREENING OUTREACH PARTNER FOR THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF MENTAL HEALTH AND NATIONAL MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION

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## INHALANTS...The Facts

### What are Inhalants ?

Inhalants can be anything that when breathed causes a “high” like a drug. The use of inhalants is called “sniffing” or “huffing”. Like alcohol, inhalants are “downers”, lowering inhibitions and ambition.

### Why do some people use Inhalants ?

The reasons for inhalant use range from peer pressure to plain boredom, but some of the most common reasons for using inhalants are :

- It’s a quick high. The effects of inhalants are immediate and last from 15 to 45 minutes. They usually cause drowsiness and if sniffed too much can cause unconsciousness.
- Inhalants are cheap and easy to get. Unlike other drugs, most inhalants are common household health and beauty products that can be found in a grocery, automotive or convenience store.
- Unlike alcohol, there is no legal age for purchasing most inhalants.
- And unlike other drugs, the dangers of inhalants aren’t well known.

### Why are Inhalants so dangerous ?

*“Sniffing is a quick high so it can’t be that bad”*

The high from inhalants is relatively quick, but the effects on the body last long after the high is gone. Many chemicals in inhalants are “fat soluble” which means they stay in fatty tissues like the brain, lungs, kidneys, liver, and bone marrow. They aren’t washed out of the body quickly and stay toxic long after the high has worn off.

### What’s the Risk ?

Because they disturb the heart and lungs almost immediately, inhalants are risky from the first try.

No one knows how much their body can take before the heartbeat becomes irregular, lungs stop taking in oxygen, or their whole system will shut down entirely. Like many other drugs, inhalant use is cumulative. The more they are used, the more of the chemicals are needed to get the original high. Because it’s difficult to control the amount of fumes inhaled, trying to get a bigger high can easily be fatal.

## **What do Inhalants look like ?**

Common inhalants are things like gasoline, transmission fluid, model airplane and other glues, nail polish and remover, paint thinners, white out and other solvents.

Even the compressed gases of canned whipped cream and cheese are used as inhalants called “whipits”. Aerosols such as spray paint are the most abused inhalants.

Other substances used as inhalants include nitrous oxide (laughing gas), dry cleaning fluids, “room deodorizers”, and Amyl Nitrate, a medical inhalant meant for use by heart patients.

## **The effects of Inhalants**

It’s the chemical vapors of these products that create the “high”.

These vapors can be collected and sniffed from soda cans, plastic sandwich or garbaged bags or cleaning rags.

### **Effects on the Body**

Some immediate effects can include :

- dizziness or headaches
- slurred speech
- sneezing, coughing, a bloody nose
- nausea
- loss of bodily functions

Some of the long term effects are :

- brain, lung, kidney damage
- tired feelings
- weak muscles
- bluish skin

## **Inhalants and Death**

Death can occur if inhalants are used with alcohol or other depressants. High concentrations of inhaled chemicals can also cause death through immediate heart failure, suffocation by leaving no room for oxygen in the lungs, or slowing ther breathing until it stops. The effects of inhalants are unpredictable. Even the first sniff can be fatal.

## **How to tell if someone is using Inhalants**

The signs of someone using inhalants include :

- spacey, “high” behavior

- clumsiness
- no sense of time or space
- sores in the nose and mouth
- chemical breath
- increased coughing, spitting
- cleaning rags in room, closet
- dried paint or spray on clothes and body
- empty spray cans, tubes of glue
- paint or solvent covered soda cans or baggies

### **What do I do if someone I know is using Inhalants ?**

Get the facts. Read the caution labels on your household products that may be used as inhalants.

Find out why the person is using. Are they trying to fit in with a group ? A new interest or strong support might stop early experimentation.

- **DON'T** confront a user while he / she is “high”
- **DON'T** lose your temper, or think of “sniffing” as a phase

If the sniffing is advanced, the user may need professional help. In many cases there may be withdrawal or long term damage to the mind and body. The user will need lots of support through the tough times of recovery.

### **Some important phone numbers for help and support are :**

Aerosol Education Bureau  
1001 Connecticut Ave., NW # 1120  
Washington, DC 20036  
(202) 872-8155

National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information  
1-800-SAY-NO-TO (DRUGS)