



Inhalants

What Are They?

Inhalants are usually found in liquid, gas or aerosol form. **They are not, technically, illegal or legal drugs,** but are chemical products with real-life purposes, such as fuel, household cleaning, spray paint or hair spray. They are not meant for human consumption, and they have immediate, often permanent, and sometimes fatal effects on anyone who uses them.

There are a few different kinds of inhalants:

- Volatile Solvents (markers, paint thinner, gasoline, cleaning supplies)
- Aerosol/Spray cans (hairspray, cooking oil spray, spray paint)
- Gases (propane, ether, butane/lighter fluid)

What Do They Look Like?

As noted above, inhalants are usually common household items, brand name products found in kitchens, bathrooms and garages, etc.

How Do They Work?

Inhalants are **extremely dangerous**. Most inhalants work by pushing all the oxygen out of your lungs, leading to **hypoxia**, which means that your body isn't getting enough oxygen to work. This lack of oxygen can cause immediate and severe health effects. Using inhalants can result in life-threatening consequences.

Why Are They Dangerous?

See above. **Inhalants are unfit for human consumption, and can kill on first use.**

Short-term effects of inhalants include:

- Hallucinations
- Anger
- Rapid heartbeat
- Nausea/Vomiting
- Seizures
- Coma
- **Sudden Sniffing Death Syndrome** (see below)

Repeated use of inhalants can cause:

- Nerve damage
- Permanent brain damage
- Organ damage (heart, liver, lungs, kidneys)



- Deafness
- Depression
- Memory loss and problems with concentration

Sudden Sniffing Death Syndrome

Sudden Sniffing Death Syndrome causes sudden death through heart attacks, sudden heart failure, or suffocation, often occurring very quickly while the person is awake. The dangers are immediate. Death can happen extremely fast.

*22% of people who die from **Sudden Sniffing Death Syndrome** are first-time users of inhalants.*

Other risks:

- **Frostbite** - Pressurized gases can cause severe frostbite on the outside AND inside of the body. This can lead to freezing the throat and airways, resulting in suffocation and death.
- **Fire** - Pressurized gases are highly flammable. Even a small spark or lit cigarette can be enough to trigger a fire or explosion, putting everybody nearby at risk.

Safer Use Tips

There is no safe use of inhalants, or such a thing as a “safe dose.” Using inhalants is extremely dangerous. Any inhalant use at all, even your first time, can cause *sudden death*.

- **Hypoxia**, or lack of oxygen, can quickly lead to death. Long breaks between inhales won't guarantee safety, but can make SSDS less likely.
- Physical activity after using inhalants can increase heart risk. Avoid running or physical exercise.
- Propane, butane, and aerosols have the highest risk of **Sudden Sniffing Death Syndrome (see above)**.
- Don't mix with alcohol or other drugs.

More Information about Inhalants:

- [Inhalant Abuse: What parents should know, from the Canadian Pediatric Society](#)
- [Inhalants – Royal Canadian Mounted Police](#)

Need Help?

Help is always available. Reach out to your [local health centre](#), community counsellor/mental health professional, or call [8-1-1](#). Visit [Getting Help](#) for more information.