

Inhalant Abuse and Dependence

What is inhalant abuse and dependence?

Inhalants are chemicals that produce fumes. Inhalants are breathed in through the nose or mouth. This is also called "sniffing" or "huffing." These chemicals reach the lungs and bloodstream quickly and cause symptoms that can be life threatening. Some inhalants are household items such as glue, paint thinner, and lighter fluid. Young children and teens can get these items easily, which makes them more likely to abuse these types of drugs.

Amyl nitrite ("poppers") is an inhalant used to improve the feelings that you have during sex. If you use amyl nitrate, you may not practice safe sex, which puts you at risk for HIV/AIDS.

Abuse and dependence are patterns of using drugs that lead to serious personal, family and health problems. Abuse is when you keep using the drug even though it causes a problem such as:

- Showing up late or missing work or school and not caring about things that used to matter to you
- Breaking rules or breaking the law
- Not keeping promises, arguing, or even getting violent with other people
- Doing things that are dangerous, such as driving while under the influence

If you continue to abuse drugs, you can become dependent. When you are dependent on inhalants, you:

- Need to use more and more of the drug, or use it more often to get the same effects
- Lose control, which means you keep using inhalants even though you know that it is harmful to you or others, or you can't stop inhalants when you try
- Crave drugs so much that you spend a lot of time and energy getting drugs, using drugs, and getting over the effects
- Have withdrawal symptoms when you stop using inhalants

Dependence is also called addiction. Inhalant addiction is very dangerous. Children and teens may not understand that experimenting with a household product like glue or lighter fluid can be life threatening. Children and teens are also more likely to do what their friends do in order to fit in or avoid teasing.

What is the cause?

You have a higher risk of becoming dependent on drugs if you:

- Have a family history of drug or alcohol abuse
- Have abused alcohol or drugs in the past
- Are easily frustrated, have trouble dealing with stress, or feel like you aren't good enough
- Are regularly around people who use alcohol or drugs

- Have a mental health problem
- Have constant pain

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms of inhalant abuse or dependence depend on how much and how often you use the drugs. The symptoms can be mild to severe, such as:

- Being overexcited, nervous, or having trouble sleeping
- Being dizzy or fainting
- Having belly pain, nausea, vomiting, or loss of appetite
- Having a fast heartbeat, heavy sweating, dry mouth, or shaking
- Seeing, hearing, or feeling things that are not real
- Feeling sleepy with a headache that lasts a long time
- Having signs of brain damage, such as not being able to learn new things, or carrying on a simple conversation

If you use inhalants for a long time, you may have signs of damage to your nerves and muscles, such as trouble walking, bending, and talking.

Sniffing large amounts of inhalants at one time can cause death within a few minutes, even if you are a healthy person.

If you are pregnant and using inhalants, your baby may have learning, growth, and behavior problems.

How is it diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider will ask how much and how often you use inhalants. Be honest about your drug use. Your provider needs this information to give you the right treatment. He will also ask about your symptoms and medical history and examine you. You may have blood or urine tests.

How is it treated?

Inhalant abuse and dependence can be treated. For any treatment to be successful, you must want to stop using inhalants. Do not try to use alcohol and other drugs to reduce withdrawal symptoms. Your healthcare provider may prescribe medicine to help you get through withdrawal.

If you are abusing or dependent on inhalants and want to quit, get help.

Self-help groups such as Narcotics Anonymous, support groups, and therapy may be helpful. You might be treated in a substance abuse treatment program. Your healthcare providers and counselors will work with you to develop a treatment program.

Recovery from dependence is a long-term process. Follow-up treatment is very important so that you don't go back to abusing drugs.

If you have overdosed, or are having severe withdrawal symptoms you will need to be treated in a hospital. You will also be treated for any health problems such as a heart attack, stroke, or other life-threatening problems.

How can I take care of myself?

The best way to help yourself is to see your healthcare provider and make plans to stop abusing inhalants. If you are already seeing a healthcare provider, it is important to take the full course of treatment he or she prescribes.

Get support. Talk with family and friends. Consider joining a support group in your area.

Learn to manage stress. Ask for help at home and work when the load is too great to handle. Find ways to relax, for example take up a hobby, listen to music, watch movies, or take walks. Try deep breathing exercises when you feel stressed.

Take care of your physical health. Try to get at least 7 to 9 hours of sleep each night. Eat a healthy diet. Limit caffeine. If you smoke, quit. Don't use alcohol or drugs. Exercise according to your healthcare provider's instructions.

Avoid situations where people are likely to use alcohol or drugs.

Check your medicines. To help prevent problems, tell your healthcare provider and pharmacist about all the medicines, natural remedies, vitamins, and other supplements that you take.

Contact your healthcare provider or therapist if you have any questions or your symptoms seem to be getting worse.

Keep trying. Many people try more than once to quit using inhalants before they finally succeed. So, never say, "I can't." You CAN learn to live without drugs in your daily life.

People and resources in your community that can help you include your healthcare providers, therapists, support groups, mental health centers, and alcohol or substance abuse treatment programs. You may want to contact:

- National Inhalant Prevention Coalition
800-269-4237
<http://www.inhalants.org>

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