

INHALANTS

St. Vincent's Mental Health Service

Factsheet on drugs and alcohol 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 can also be called "chroming", although this 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
- Less inhibition and increased risk-taking
- Hallucinations
- Bad breath
- Nosebleeds and sores.

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.

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
- Irritation
- Aggressive behaviour
- You may also experience tremors, shakes, nausea and dizziness.

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 using.

Inhalants and pregnancy

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

Inhalants and other drugs

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

INHALANTS continued

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.
- 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.

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 to do if your friend passes out?

Remove the bag from your friend’s mouth. If the person is unconscious, check their airway is clear, turn 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.

Useful phone numbers

Emergency	000
DirectLine	1800 888 236
Drug Info	1300 858 584
Suicide Helpline	1300 651 251
Smoking Quitline	13 18 48
Family Drug Help	1300 660 068

Conclusion

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

See also: Factsheet 7

USEFUL PHONE NUMBERS & WEBSITES

St. Vincent’s Mental Health Service 1300 55 88 62

Information contained in this pamphlet is offered for general purposes and should not be considered as substitute for advice from your case manager, drug and alcohol worker or doctor.