

SOLVENTS

'Volatile Substances'



What you need to know

**SOLVENT
ABUSE
CAN KILL
INSTANTLY**

Solvent abuse (or 'volatile substance abuse', 'VSA' for short) is the inhalation of volatile chemicals found in everyday products such as cigarette lighter refills and aerosols, for the purpose of getting 'high'. In the UK it's also known as *sniffing, tooting, buzzing, and huffing*.

Solvent abuse kills about **50 people a year in the UK**, some the first time they use, some who have used for many years. **Inhaling these chemicals causes the heart to beat irregularly which can lead to a fatal heart attack called 'Sudden Sniffing Death Syndrome'**. Some volatile substances are more dangerous than others and butane gas (e.g. in aerosols and cigarette lighter refills) is currently the biggest killer.

The Law

It is legal to possess all these products. Most of them have a legitimate household purpose, e.g. aerosols or lighter refills. It is also legal to possess poppers and nitrous oxide (laughing gas).

However, it is illegal to import, produce, sell or supply nitrous oxide for recreational purposes. It is also illegal to sell products like butane gas if the seller believes they are going to be inhaled to get high.



Effects & Risks

Inhaling glues, gases, solvents and/or aerosols can cause confusion, slurred speech, mood swings, aggressive behaviour, hallucinations, vomiting, blackouts, and breathing difficulties.

Many products are flammable and there is a risk of burns and explosions, especially if someone is smoking nearby or if in an enclosed space.

They can also seriously affect your judgment and when you're high there's a real danger you'll try something dangerous.

NITROUS OXIDE, 'LAUGHING GAS' OR 'HIPPIY CRACK'



Nitrous oxide is a gas used medically as an anaesthetic. It's also used in catering as the propellant in whipped cream chargers. Some people use it as a recreational drug, usually inhaled from a balloon to get high.

Nitrous oxide acts as a depressant (not unlike alcohol), in that it slows down the body's system and leads to feelings of euphoria, relaxation, calmness and happiness.

Taking nitrous oxide can cause:

- fits of giggles and laughter – hence the nickname 'laughing gas'
- sound distortions and hallucinations – when you see or hear things that aren't there

Nitrous oxide can also:

- give you a severe headache
- cause dizziness
- stop you thinking straight
- cause short-lived but intense feelings of paranoia

Health risks of inhaling nitrous oxide

PLEASE BE AWARE OF THE FOLLOWING HEALTH RISKS:

- Inhaling nitrous oxide through a mask (so that oxygen levels in the body are depleted) runs the risk of suffocation or asphyxiation. This could also apply to repeated inhalations when the body is not given time to recover in between.
- The use of individual nitrous oxide balloons is not associated with sudden sniffing death syndrome but people with heart conditions may be at higher risk as nitrous oxide, like other volatile substances, can cause heart arrhythmia (skipped heartbeats).
- Nitrous oxide inactivates B12 reserves in the body. Users are reporting tingling in the limbs and prolonged use can cause anaemia and a form of nerve damage called peripheral neuropathy.

There have been 36 deaths in Great Britain specifically associated with nitrous oxide between 2001-2016 (ONS).

HOW TO STAY SAFE



Tolerance of solvents can build up within a few weeks in regular users, so you might need to use more to achieve the same effects. This reverts back to normal within a few days of stopping.

It may be possible to become psychologically dependent on volatile substances, meaning the users develop an increased desire to keep using despite any harms they experience.

Withdrawal symptoms have been reported in regular users. When they stop their use they experience anxiety, irritability and headaches.

There is no 'safe' form of solvent abuse that will take away the risk of death from heart failure. This risk will always be present but, if you choose to use, please keep the following information in mind.

▶ FOLLOW THIS HARM REDUCTION ADVICE

- Don't do it alone. There is always a risk of death and someone with you can call an ambulance
- Avoid spraying directly into the mouth
- Don't smoke or light cigarettes. All volatile substances are highly flammable
- Don't drink alcohol or use other drugs at the same time as using gases/solvents.
- Make sure people know where you are. Stay in a safe environment - away from roads, heights, or anywhere you could have an accident
- Don't argue with, chase, or excite someone who is high on gases/solvents. Raising their adrenaline levels increases their risk of death.

**For further support and advice contact the EDAS/Reach Young Peoples team.
We are here to help! Get in touch with us on
01202 741414 or 0800 0434656 - option 2.**

