

FACT SHEET THIRTY

INHALANTS

Examples:

Solvents, glue, laughing gas, gas, nitrous, liquid incense, room deodoriser, rush, poppers, snappers.

Method of Use : Inhaling

Dependence Potential : Possible addiction

What are Inhalants?

Inhalants are breathable substances that produce psychoactive (mood altering) vapours. These substances include:

- Solvents such as glue, nail polish remover, lighter and cleaner fluids, petrol, typewriter correction fluid (tippex)
- Aerosols such as hairspray, paint, paint thinners
- Anaesthetics such as halothane and nitrous oxide (laughing gas)

These are substances not are not usually considered drugs because they were developed for other legitimate purposes. They can however be dangerous when purposefully and excessively inhaled.

Two of the popular inhalants are amyl nitrate and butyl nitrate. Amyl nitrate is used for heart patients and diagnostic purposes because it dilates the blood vessels and makes the heart beat faster. It is a clear yellowish liquid that is now sold in shops and by mail order, marked 'poppers' and 'snappers'. Butyl nitrate is packaged in small bottles, often marked as incense and sold under a variety of names including 'locker-room' and 'rush'.

Immediate effects include flushed face, dizziness, decreased blood pressure followed by and increased heart rate and a head ache., the effects last from a few seconds to several minutes.

Amyl nitrate and butyl nitrate are often used in sexual activity.

Signs and Symptoms of Inhalant Use:

- Smell on breath and clothes
- Runny
- Drowsiness
- Poor muscle control
- Paraphernalia such as bags or rags, small bottles, discarded aerosols

Pattern of Inhalant Use:

Young teenagers are more likely to abuse inhalants because they are inexpensive and readily available. Inhalants are mostly taken by groups of young people, usually beginning as part of a fashion or fad, and are administered in any one of several methods:

- Glues - usually inhaled from plastic or paper bags, using a bag increases the intensity of the resulting feeling and markedly increases the chances of suffocation.
- Industrial solvents - cleaning solutions and paint thinners are generally inhaled from the container, sniffed off a cloth or by placing the cloth in the mouth.
- Petrol - usually inhaled directly from tanks or petrol carriers.
- Propellants - usually inhaled directly but some users try to separate the contents by straining the gases through cloth.

Inhalants in the Body

Chemicals used for sniffing are all fat soluble, organic substances that easily pass through the bloodstream and are metabolised in the liver and kidneys. They produce effects that are similar to anaesthetics which act to slow down the body's functions.

The high begins within minutes and lasts from ten to 45 minutes, with low doses the user may feel slightly stimulated. With moderate amounts users may feel less inhibited, less in control, light headed and giddy (similar to alcohol intoxication). Large doses can cause unconsciousness.

Short-term Effects of Inhalant Use

Inhalant users may exhibit several adverse affects including:

- Nausea
- Ringing in the ears
- Coughing and sneezing
- Nose bleeds
- Feeling and looking very tired
- Abnormal heart rhythms
- Bad breath
- Double vision
- Irritation and watering of the eyes
- Poor judgement and co-ordination
- Muscle and joint pains
- Poor appetite
- Chest pains

Long-term Effects on

Extended use of inhalants can cause weight loss, fatigue and electrolyte (salt) imbalances. Repeated use can permanently damage the nervous system greatly reducing physical and mental abilities.

Because inhalants are easily absorbed into the bloodstream and metabolised by the liver and kidneys, prolonged use will result in blood, bone marrow, liver and kidney damage.

Deep breathing of vapours or extended use of inhalants during a short period of time may result in other serious effects such as the loss of self control, violent behaviour and ultimately

Sniffing highly concentrated solvents or aerosols can produce heart failure and rapid death. High concentrations of inhalants will also cause death from suffocation by dispersing oxygen in the lungs.

As with alcohol, inhalants also depress the central nervous system and can do so to the point where breathing stops.

Tolerance

Tolerance is defined as the need for larger doses of the drug to produce the same effect. Tolerance develops quickly amongst inhalant users.

As users mature, they commonly seek other substances such as Marijuana, Cocaine and LSD in order to achieve similar highs.

Sniffing solvents during pregnancy will result in birth defects, the primary solvent responsible for these defects is Toluene, which is found in aerosol spray paints, petrol and many other household products.

Conclusions

Repeated use of inhalants appears in early teenage years and most users move onto other drugs as they mature. High truancy and drop-out from school rates are associated with inhalant use. A very recent trend of inhalant use is in conjunction with alcohol and Marijuana.