

Inhalant Use Disorder

Also called Inhalant Use Disorder

Breathing in fumes to get high is riskier than it looks, and stopping is very doable with the right help.

HOW COMMON

About 4 in 1,000 US teens

OFTEN STARTS

Ages 12 to 17

TREATABLE

Yes - most stop by their 20s

YOU ARE NOT ALONE

About 100,000 US teens a year

What this is

- Inhalant use disorder means breathing in fumes from everyday products keeps causing harm and has become hard to stop.
- The products are legal and cheap - glue, spray paint, butane, computer duster, markers - and that hides how risky they are.
- A single use can stop the heart. It is rare, but it is real, and it can happen the very first time. You deserve to know that.
- If you are a parent reading this, your child is not beyond help. Most young people stop, and treatment gets them there sooner.

What it can look and feel like

- A chemical smell on breath, hair, or clothing that does not match anything else going on in the house.
- A red, chapped rash around the mouth and nose, or paint and marker stains on hands, face, or sleeves.
- Empty cans, bags, rags, or duster canisters turning up in a bedroom, in a backpack, or in the trash.
- Looking drunk with no alcohol around: slurred words, stumbling, giggling, then clearing up within the hour.
- Household products going missing, or money and small items disappearing to pay for more of them.
- Slipping grades, dropping out of activities, and a new group of friends nobody in the family has met.
- Feeling dull, forgetful, or unsteady on your feet even on the days when you have not used at all.

What is happening in your brain and body

- The fumes reach your brain in seconds and slow it down, much as alcohol does, but the high fades in under an hour.
- Because it fades so fast, people breathe in again and again over hours, and that is when the danger really stacks up.
- Solvents make the heart jumpy. A sudden fright or a sprint right after using can set off a rhythm that stops the heart.
- Used over months, solvents strip the coating off brain wiring, which shows up as poorer balance, memory, and thinking.
- Nitrous oxide, sold as whippets, destroys **vitamin B12**, leaving hands and feet numb and tingling and walking unsteady.

What can make it more likely

- These products are simply the first thing available to a young person who cannot get hold of alcohol or anything else.
- It usually starts in a group. Friends show each other how, and nobody standing there believes it is dangerous.
- Getting away from abuse, neglect, hunger, or grief is a common reason, and that pain needs treating alongside the using.
- ADHD, behavior problems, depression, and struggling at school all raise the chance of starting and of carrying on.

What to expect

- Most people stop by their early 20s, and treatment makes that happen sooner and with far less harm along the way.
- There is no withdrawal to get through here. The hard part is the pull of the group and the habit, not your body.
- Thinking and balance usually improve after stopping, though heavy use over years can leave some lasting trouble.
- Treatment often works best away from the old friend group, which is why a residential program is sometimes advised.

What helps Treatment works. Most people get better.

Talking therapies

- **Cognitive behavioral therapy** for teens uses short, plain sessions on triggers, saying no, and filling the time.
- **Motivational enhancement therapy** is a few sessions about what you want your life to look like, with no lectures.
- **Family therapy** brings parents into the plan, because home and neighborhood are half of what keeps the use going.
- **Contingency management** rewards attendance and drug-free tests with vouchers, and it improves both very reliably.
- Getting back into school, sport, or a job matters as much as therapy, since it fills the hours that using filled.

Medicines

- No medicine treats inhalant use disorder itself. The work is done through therapy, family, and a safer environment.
- **Vitamin B12** shots repair nerve damage from whippets, and the sooner they are started, the more feeling comes back.
- Treating ADHD, depression, or anxiety underneath makes staying stopped much easier, so ask to be checked for all three.
- In an emergency, staff keep everything calm and watch the heart, because fright itself can set off a bad rhythm.
- Any medicine used here is aimed at a separate condition, and your prescriber picks it and sets the dose with you.

Everyday things that help

- If you are a parent, lock up or clear out solvents, aerosols, duster, and butane. Access is the single biggest factor.
- Never use alone, and never chase someone who has just used. Startling them is exactly what triggers the heart problem.
- Change the routine, not just the promise: a different route home, different hours, different people after school.
- Get a health check. Kidneys, liver, blood counts, and B12 all take a hit, and every one of them can be followed.
- SAMHSA's free helpline, **1-800-662-4357**, will find treatment near you day or night, in English or Spanish.

Get help right away if

- Call 911 for chest pain, fainting, a seizure, or a pounding uneven heartbeat after using.
- Numb or tingling hands and feet, or trouble walking, after whippets means see a doctor this week.
- If you or your child think about ending your life, call or text **988**, or go to the nearest emergency room.

Questions to ask your care team

- Which products in our home are the ones I most need to lock away?
- Should the heart, kidneys, liver, and B12 level all be checked now?
- Would a residential program suit us better than weekly appointments?
- Who treats teenagers for this near us, and how soon can we be seen?

Where this information comes from

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NOTE

Sources are listed in APA 7th edition style. This handout is general health information, not medical advice, and it does not replace talking with your own doctor, therapist, or prescriber. Medicine choices and doses are decided with your prescriber. If you are in danger or thinking about hurting yourself, call or text 988 in the United States, or go to your nearest emergency room.