

Substance Use, Abuse and Dependence

Classification and Information on Substances

Inhalants (Poppers)

DESCRIPTION	Inhalants can be classified into 3 main types: organic solvents (such as petrol, lighter fluid, paint thinners etc), nitrites (such as 'poppers' and 'rush'), and nitrous oxide (such as laughing gas). The focus here will be on nitrites, more specifically amyl nitrite (or more commonly known as 'poppers'). 'Poppers' is usually found in small plastic bottles or capsules, and takes the form of a clear yellowish liquid. It is volatile, highly flammable and usually has a sweet scent.
MODE OF ADMINISTRATION	'Poppers' is usually inhaled intra-nasally by sniffing it.
PRIMARY EFFECT	Central nervous system stimulant.
SHORT-TERM EFFECTS	<p>The effects are experienced immediately as a quick rush that lasts between 2 and 4 minutes. The following effects are usually present:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vasodilation (the enlargement of blood vessels, an increase in heart rate, and a rush of blood to the head, causing a warm blushing sensation); • Mild euphoria, altered sense of time, and an increase in sexual feelings (as such used to heighten sexual stimulation during orgasm); • Impairment in physical co-ordination and judgement; • Respiratory depression (including difficulty breathing); • In large doses, can produce mental confusion, hallucinations, paranoia, nausea, vomiting, headaches, hypotension, drowsiness and irritation of the respiratory tract (including severe coughing, painful inflammation and nose bleeds); • Can be lethal when combined with other drugs (alcohol, speed, ecstasy and Viagra for example).
LONG-TERM EFFECTS	<p>In general, the long-term effects of using 'poppers' appears to be minimal. However some may report the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persistent pounding headaches; • Increase in tolerance, therefore increased need for larger doses to achieve same results; • Heavy doses may result in permanent brain damage (including an impairment in memory, extreme mood swings, tremors and seizures); • Heavy and continued use may also result in heart arrhythmia and respiratory failure; • Ongoing pressure of the fluid in the eyes may lead to glaucoma and blindness.
ADDICTION POTENTIAL	High psychological and physical addiction potential.
TREATMENT OPTIONS	In cases of heavy and prolonged use, inpatient and/or outpatient treatment with the use of multiple therapeutic methods (individual, family and group psychotherapy) is usually necessary to achieve lasting abstinence. Co-morbid conditions are treated if required.