

Sniffing overdoses happen all at once, without warning. And often, things stay that way. Permanently.



### Reasons to Pass on Gas

So if sniffing is so bad, why do people do it?

One reason is that inhalants are easy to get. That's one reason that they're used more often by younger kids than older teens and adults, who can usually get alcohol or other drugs more easily.

But why do kids do them?

For two reasons, mostly: Some don't know any better. And others don't care.

Some seem to think that, since the products that inhalants come in are legal, sniffing must not be a big deal.

They're wrong. Because sniffing is a big deal, one that's dangerous and addictive.

That means that people who try it for fun (or out of curiosity) sometimes keep on doing it because sniffing just takes over and they forget how to chill out without it.

Still others do it to be cool or because they gotta try everything they think there is to try.

They might start out because their friends do it or because they think it makes them look bad (good bad, not bad bad—but sometimes, they look that way, too) to do something so dangerous—and risky.

Maybe they think that getting messed up on chemicals proves that they're cool or grown-up—or something.

But it doesn't. It just proves that they're as messed up as some messed-up adults. As if there's a big need for more of those...

## Did U Know

Percentage of middle-school students who've tried inhalants by 8th grade: 17.1

Percentage of 10th-graders who say they disapprove of trying inhalants even once or twice: 87.8

Source: U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services, 1/2002



### Stinking Thinking

Still, no matter how many reasons people have for sniffing, there's one better reason for not sniffing and here it is: Sniffing messes people up—sometimes for keeps.

That's why we think it's a good idea (Good idea? Make that a great idea) to think about the things we've talked about in this pamphlet and make up your mind about sniffing now.

Your decision is just too important to stumble into or put off until one of your friends decides for you.



That could leave you holding the bag—or getting zipped up in one.

Think about it.

We're betting that if you consider the real facts, you'll come to the conclusion (like we're about to) that life is a lot cooler than any gunk you can squeeze from a tube or snort out of a can.

Any other conclusion would just be another example of stinking thinking. ■



# Inhalants



## Why to Pass on Gas

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## ■ The Nose Knows

There are a lot of smells in the world. Think about it: There's the smell of wet grass in the park and popcorn at the movies, the jumbled-up mix of ocean and pizza and sun-tan lotion at the beach, the smell of Christmas trees in December, and rain on a summer day.

Those are all pretty cool smells.



There are other smells, too, and not all of them are totally cool. We won't go into detail about them, because we've all caught a whiff of some pretty funky odors at one time or another, and the less said about them, the better.

On the other hand, we do need to take a closer look at one set of smells that's stirred up big problems for thousands of young people: the group of chemicals called inhalants.

They're called inhalants because they're inhaled (or sniffed) into the body, where they cause a lot of weird changes in the body and mind, just like alcohol and other drugs.



That's what this pamphlet is all about.

In it, we'll talk about how inhalants work — and why they're not a gas, or something to sniff at.

Because in this whole world of good smells and bad smells, inhalants are a set of chemicals that can make life stink.

## ■ Introducing Inhalants

So what are inhalants?

They're a lot of things — more than 1,400 different things, at last count — that cause giddiness and intoxication when they're sniffed.

For the record, though, inhalants fall into three main groups. These are:

- Solvents
- Aerosols
- Nitrites and nitrous oxide

The solvents group includes such "everyday" chemicals as glue, gasoline, lighter fluid, cleaning compounds, paint thinner, and typewriter correction fluid.

Aerosols include the propellant gases found in hairsprays and deodorants, cooking oils, spray paint, and air fresheners.



**Gunk Patrol.** Solvents are more alike than different — especially in the problems they cause.

Aerosols coat the lungs with so much gunk that breathing can stop altogether. For an out-of-luck sniffer, it's like drowning on dry land.



Nitrites are a group of chemicals related to the heart stimulant amyl nitrite and an anesthetic gas sometimes used by dentists, nitrous oxide, or "laughing gas."



Even though the chemicals used as inhalants are made for legitimate reasons and are often legal, one purpose that none of them is intended for is being inhaled for fun.

But lots of people — especially kids — do just that. And when they do, problems often start blowing their way, sometimes right in their faces.

## ■ Facts & Effects

Different as they are, inhalants are a lot alike in the way they act in the body. Each changes the way the brain works by cutting the flow of oxygen and replacing it with the chemical that's being sniffed.

Other effects are usually pretty similar, too. A person may feel drunk, numb, and dizzy — all at once.

If that sounds pretty cool, remember that inhalants are alike in one more important way: They cause major problems for people. Irreversible ones, sometimes.

Here's how it works: As soon as they're sniffed, inhalants spring into action, rushing into the lungs and bloodstream.

From there, they zip to the brain (where they zap normal functions) and the heart, kidneys, and liver, where they mess things up to their little heart's content. (If they had a heart.)

That's when the real problems kick in.

What sort of real problems?

Take your pick: big ones, little ones, temporary ones, permanent ones — inhalants can cause 'em all.

## ■ Problem Parade

Examples of little problems (if you can call them that) include slowed reflexes, double vision, and ringing in the ears.

Bigger problems include delusional thoughts and hallucinations and the risk of permanent damage to the brain and other body organs.

And there are bigger problems, still — suffocation, for example.

That happens when glue sniffers pass out with their faces buried in glue-filled plastic bags. If no one notices, they never come back up for air.



**Monsters 'R' Us.** Sniffing causes problems that are real monsters — from hallucinations and freaky behavior to heart attacks.

Aerosols pose similar risks.

They can coat the lungs with

so much gunk that the alveoli (the tiny air sacs in the lungs that process oxygen) can't work. For an unlucky sniffer, it's like drowning on dry land.

Then there's long-term damage. Body organs don't like the poisonous effects of inhalants — and die a little every time they're exposed to them just to prove it.

And if your body doesn't die enough so that you notice it today, there's always tomorrow. Your odds of serious problems will be better then, thanks to a process called tolerance.

That means that sniffers have to keep using more and more of their favorite chemical to keep achieving the same effects.

And we haven't even gotten to overdoses yet. In fact, overdose is the biggest danger linked to most inhalants because it happens so quickly, without warning. It isn't like some other kinds of drug overdose, which can develop slowly, even over a period of hours.

Sniffing overdoses happen all at once, without warning. And way too often, things stay that way. Permanently.

