

# CHEMICAL ABUSE

## What's an Inhalant?

An inhalant can be any chemical that people huff to get high. The chemicals in inhalants were never meant to be put in your body like other things considered "drugs." However, they're used like drugs, and when they're inhaled so that someone can get high, they become a deadly substance that kills brain cells...and can end a life.

Inhalants aren't found on the streets; most of them can be found in the bathroom or kitchen cabinet.

Products containing commonly abused chemicals include:

- Paints and spray paints
- Gasoline
- Glue and rubber cement
- Air fresheners
- Aerosols (for example: hair spray, cooking spray, or computer cleaning products)
- Whipped cream dispensers



It's not harmful to use these products as directed, only when they're huffed.

## SIGNS OF A HUFFER

### How to Recognize Inhalant Abuse

Often, people who are high from abusing inhalants look and act like they're drunk – so it's not so easy to tell that they've been huffing. They stumble around and slur their speech like drunks, but they might also display other signs. These include runny noses, rashes around the mouth and nose and breath with a weird chemical smell.

If you suspect that one of your friends is huffing, don't delay – you know how dangerous it is to abuse inhalants. Keep an eye on your friend, and then tell a trusted adult. You just might end up saving a life.

## SAYING "NO" TO HUFFING

### Your Body and Brain Deserve Better

If someone asks you to huff, stay strong and say "no" with one of these lines:

- "No thanks. That stuff makes you stupid."
- "Did you know that huffing can kill you or give you brain damage?"
- "Gross. That stuff makes you smell like chemicals."

## WORK IT OUT!

How much do you know about inhalants? Take the quiz and find out!

1. Inhalants can damage the cells in your liver.  
a. True                      b. False
2. Abusing inhalants is called "huffing."  
a. True                      b. False
3. "Sudden sniffing death" can happen after huffing just once.  
a. True                      b. False
4. Some chemicals are safe to huff.  
a. True                      b. False
5. Side effects of huffing inhalants include vomiting and confusion.  
a. True                      b. False

Answers: 1. True, 2. True, 3. True, 4. False, 5. True

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# INHALANTS



## HUFFING HAZARD





## BEWARE THE KITCHEN CABINET

### Huffing

You put the paper bag to your mouth and breathe in deeply. It makes you cough, choking on fumes that burn down your throat. Your chest tingles and you feel lightheaded, but you try again.

As the bag inflates and deflates, you start to feel lightheaded and see spots. You close your eyes, hoping the room will stop spinning around you.

Your heart stops and you collapse next to the toilet. Your family finds you in the bathroom, next to the deadly evidence: a paper bag and an open can of spray paint.

## BRAIN BENDER

### The Dangers of Huffing

When you huff a bunch of chemicals into your lungs, they get sent straight into your bloodstream, go up into your brain and start to interfere with your myelin, the protective sheath around your nerves. This damage causes your brain to act really slow and it can't transfer messages to the rest of your body as quickly as usual, so you end up uncoordinated and having trouble with simple things like walking and talking.

Even worse, the chemicals can stay in your body's fatty tissue for a long time. These toxic chemicals can continue to mess with your brain for years to come.

## HUFFING HAZARDS

### Unnatural Reactions

Huffing the chemicals in inhalants into your body can cause some nasty side effects, including:

- Slurred speech
- Loss of coordination
- Dizziness
- Hallucinations and delusions
- Headaches
- Confusion
- Nausea and vomiting
- Sudden sniffing death

"Sudden sniffing death" can happen to anyone, even a healthy person. This condition is when your heart stops beating within minutes of breathing in these toxic chemicals. When you decide to huff, you're actually gambling with your life.

## BRAIN BLOCK AHEAD

### The Long-Term Consequences of Huffing

So, how could the long-term effects be worse?

Well, long-term use of inhalants can make you stupid – literally. Huffing an inhalant deprives your body of oxygen, which causes something called "hypoxia." Once you slip into hypoxia, the damage to your cells starts, especially the ones in your brain. If this effect lasts too long, your cells start to die one by one. Those are brain cells that you can't replace.

Other long-term effects of huffing include:

- Shortened memory and memory loss
- Addiction
- Liver and kidney damage
- Damage to the brain and nervous system
- Heart failure
- Suffocation
- Death

As you can see, huffing causes a lot of damage to your body and your brain. This "cheap high" can cost you your life, and that's probably a lot more than you bargained for.



## MEMORY FREEZE

### Michelle's Story

Michelle gets out a big book titled "My Brain Book" and flips the pages. She's 24 years old, but can't remember how to iron a shirt. Luckily, her book has step-by-step instructions on setting up her ironing board, applying starch and heating the iron.

Michelle was a 19-year-old freshman in Washington when she almost died, suffering permanent brain damage in the process. She didn't get into a car accident; she was just trying to get high – by huffing spray paint.

It was her boyfriend Matt's idea to get high one weekend. He figured a cheap way to do it would be by huffing spray paint out of a paper bag. He passed Michelle the bag filled with chemicals, and she took a few deep breaths of the poisonous mixture. When she passed out on the floor, Matt thought she was joking...until he couldn't wake her up.

Michelle spent five weeks in a coma. She was lucky to wake up at all, but the brain damage resulted in profound short-term memory loss. The damage was so bad that Michelle had to quit school.

Now she lives in an assisted-living community because she needs help with day-to-day tasks. She can't remember her address, or even the names of people she sees every day. Instead, she uses "My Brain Book" to get through the day: it has pictures and instructions on things like making coffee, turning on the television and flossing her teeth. It also has maps to help her get to places like the grocery store, the movie theater and the assisted living community office.

Michelle only tried huffing once, which of course, she doesn't remember. She didn't die from huffing, but she's an example of how people who huff can end up ruining their brains and their lives.