Inhalants

Overview
Inhalants are invisible, volatile substances found in common household products that produce chemical vapors that are inhaled to induce psychoactive or mind altering effects.

Street names
Gluey, Huff, Rush, Whippets

Looks like
Common household products such as glue, lighter fluid, cleaning fluids, and paint all produce chemical vapors that can be inhaled.

Methods of abuse
Although other abused substances can be inhaled, the term “inhalants” is used to describe a variety of substances whose main common characteristic is that they are rarely, if ever, taken by any route other than inhalation. Inhalants are breathed in through the nose or the mouth in a variety of ways, such as: “sniffing” or “snorting”; “bagging” — sniffing or inhaling fumes from substances sprayed or deposited inside a plastic or paper bag; and “huffing” from an inhalant-soaked rag stuffed in the mouth, or inhaling from balloons filled with nitrous oxide. Inhalants are often among the first drugs that young children use. About 1 in 5 kids report having used inhalants by the eighth grade. Inhalants are also one of the few substances abused more by younger children than by older ones.

Affect on mind
Inhalant abuse can cause damage to the parts of the brain that control thinking, moving, seeing, and hearing. Cognitive abnormalities can range from mild impairment to severe dementia.

Affect on body
Inhaled chemicals are rapidly absorbed through the lungs into the bloodstream and quickly distributed to the brain and other organs. Nearly all inhalants produce effects similar to anesthetics, which slow down the body’s function. Depending on the degree of abuse, the user can experience slight stimulation, feeling of less inhibition or loss of consciousness. Within minutes of inhalation, the user experiences intoxication along with other effects similar to those produced by alcohol. These effects may include slurred speech, an inability to coordinate movements, euphoria, and dizziness. After heavy use of inhalants, abusers may feel drowsy for several hours and experience a lingering headache. Additional symptoms exhibited by long-term inhalant abusers include: weight loss, muscle weakness, disorientation, inattentive- ness, lack of coordination, irritability, depression, and damage to the nervous system and other organs. Some of the damaging effects to the body may be at least partially reversible when inhalant abuse is
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Drugs causing similar effects
Most inhalants produce a rapid high that is similar to the effects of alcohol intoxication.

Overdose effects
Because intoxication lasts only a few minutes, abusers try to prolong the high by continuing to inhale repeatedly over the course of several hours, which is a very dangerous practice. With successive inhalations, abusers may suffer loss of consciousness and/or death. “Sudden sniffling death” can result from a single session of inhalant use by an otherwise healthy young person. Sudden sniffling death is particularly associated with the abuse of butane, propane, and chemicals in aerosols. Inhalant abuse can also cause death by asphyxiation from repeated inhalations, which lead to high concentrations of inhaled fumes displacing the available oxygen in the lungs, suffocation by blocking air from entering the lungs when inhaling fumes from a plastic bag placed over the head, and choking from swallowing vomit after inhaling substances.

Legal status in the United States
The common household products that are misused as inhalants are legally available for their intended and legitimate uses. Many state legislatures have attempted to deter youth who buy legal products to get high by placing restriction on the sale of these products to minors.

Common places of origin
There are more than 1,000 products that are very dangerous when inhaled — things like typewriter correction fluid, air conditioning refrigerant, felt tip markers, spray paint, air freshener, butane, and even cooking spray. See products abused as inhalants at www.inhalants.org/product.htm (National Inhalant Prevention Coalition).