

ALERT!

Freon Huffing



INHALANT ABUSE—the intentional inhalation of vapors from solvents or other chemicals to get high—has been relatively common among young people for decades. Studies show that as many as 1 in 5 people have experimented with inhalants at least once in their lives, usually as adolescents or young adults. Household products and other easily accessible substances are typically used to get high.

The abuse of inhalants may be referred to as “huffing” or “sniffing” (breathing in vapors directly from a container or from a chemically soaked cloth such as a shirtsleeve or rag), “dusting” (inhaling aerosol sprays that contain propellants and solvents—primarily referring to computer cleaning products), or “bagging” (spraying substances into a bag and breathing from it, or placing it over ones head—sometimes leading to suffocation).

In recent years the popularity of freon huffing has been on the rise. Abusers are usually adolescents who get access to freon through air conditioning units next to homes in their neighborhoods or out of cars. It’s a cheap and easy high that can be deadly. Freon huffing cuts off oxygen to the brain which can lead to brain damage or death, and it only takes a small amount to cause serious harm. It is possible to prevent freon huffing by having a freon lock installed on your air conditioning unit at a cost of around \$25–30.

Young people often abuse inhalants because they are unaware of the risks, and inhalants are easy to find. In addition to freon, there are hundreds of common household products that potentially can be abused. These items include solvents such as: paint thinner, gasoline, correction fluid, felt-tip markers, nail polish remover, and glues. Aerosol sprays like deodorant, spray paint, fabric protector sprays, vegetable oil sprays, and hair products often contain solvents and propellants that can also be abused. Other categories of inhalants include gases (refrigerants, anesthetics, butane lighters, propane, nitrous oxide, etc.) and nitrites (a group of chemicals sometimes found in room deodorizers or sold in small capsules called “poppers” or “snappers”).

For most users, inhalant abuse results in initial excitation, then drowsiness, lightheadedness, and agitation. Inhalant abusers also report feeling a loss of inhibitions. Additional effects may also include dizziness, hallucinations, delusions, belligerence, apathy, and impaired judgment. Long-term inhalant abusers may suffer weight loss, muscle weakness, disorientation, inattentiveness, lack of coordination, irritability, and depression. Serious and sometimes irreversible damage to the user’s heart, liver, kidneys, lungs, and brain may also occur.

Death from inhalant abuse can occur after a single use or after prolonged use. Sudden sniffing death (SSD) may result within minutes of inhalant abuse from irregular heart rhythm leading to heart failure. Other causes of death include asphyxiation, aspiration, or suffocation. A user who is suffering from impaired judgment may also experience fatal injuries from motor vehicle accidents, sudden falls, or drowning. ☹

REFERENCES

<http://www.justice.gov/ndic/pubs07/708/index.htm>

<http://www.nida.nih.gov/infofacts/inhalants.html>

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