

Pregnancy and inhalants

Can you reduce the harm?

The use of inhalants and other volatile substances is harmful to your health. However, if you do use these substances here are some suggestions to help you reduce the risks.

- If you have been using inhalants and discover you are pregnant—seek help to cease using.
- Do not use alcohol and/or other drugs while inhaling, as this increases the risk of dangerous accidents or overdose.
- Do not inhale alone or in dangerous or unsafe places.
- Beware of the risks of suffocation with plastic bags.
- Do not smoke around inhalants as many of the chemicals are flammable.

Important numbers

Women's Alcohol and Drug Service 9344 3631

Website www.rwh.org.au/wads

Drug Info Line Free Call – 1300 858 584

24 hour counselling and referral service

Direct line Free Call – 1800 888 236

The Royal Women's Hospital

Young Mum's Program 9344 2189

Website www.ypp.org.au

YSAS (Youth Substance Abuse Service) 9418 1020

Contact details

8.30am – 5.30pm Monday to Friday

Women's Alcohol and Drug Service

264 Cardigan Street Carlton Victoria 3053

Phone 03 9344 3631

Email womens.ads@rwh.org.au

Web www.rwh.org.au/wads

After hours assistance via RWH emergency department

Phone 03 9344 2000



What are inhalants?

Inhalants are substances that when inhaled cause you to feel intoxicated or 'high'.

Inhalants are depressants which slow down the activity of the brain and central nervous system.

Some of the more common inhalants are chrome based paint (chroming), aerosol spray cans, glue, petrol, gas from lighters, and paint thinner.

Nitrites are another form of inhalants. Nitrites are clear yellow liquids that are inhaled for their intoxicating effect.

What are the effects and risks of inhalant use?

The effects of inhalants vary from person to person and can depend on factors such as a person's size, weight, general health and how much of the drug is taken. Once substances are inhaled, they enter the bloodstream and even small amounts can have an effect. Effects are often compared to being 'drunk', feeling happy and less inhibited, however these effects usually only last for a short period of time.

Following the initial 'high', drowsiness, confusion and moodiness can be experienced. Other effects include flu like symptoms, runny nose, glazed or blood shot eyes, unpleasant breath and headache. In some cases diarrhoea and nose bleeds are experienced.

Long term effects for heavy and frequent users include general health problems, skin discolouration, tremors, weight loss, excessive tiredness, eye damage and heart problems. The immediate dangers of sniffing inhalants include an increased risk of accidents, and in rare cases, brain damage and death.

Effects in pregnancy

Inhalants contain many toxic substances which are harmful to both you and your baby. It is believed that nearly all inhalants cross the placenta and enter the baby's blood stream. For this reason, it is important you cease using inhalants during pregnancy.

Some of the known effects on the baby are early delivery, breathing problems and an increased risk of infection. It is also suggested that the unborn baby can experience periods of reduced oxygen, which can affect brain development. This has the potential to impact on a child's life long learning ability.

General pregnancy care

Discussing inhalant use whilst you are pregnant might be difficult, however it is important that you talk to a health worker, midwife, doctor or someone who you trust to help you with your concerns.

Regular pregnancy care is important to ensure you are healthy and your baby is growing well.

Breastfeeding and inhalants

The effect of inhaling volatile substances during breastfeeding has not been fully researched. Whilst major quantities of inhalants probably do not pass through breast milk, breastfeeding whilst affected by inhalants is not safe and not recommended.

Drug and alcohol counselling

Pregnancy is often a good motivator to cease inhalant use. Drug and alcohol counselling can provide an opportunity to:

- Understand why you are using inhalants
- Cope with peer pressure
- Explore personal issues and make positive changes
- Learn new ways to manage stress
- Develop ways to stop or reduce use
- Access information about harm minimisation, so you can reduce the harm to yourself and your baby
- Obtain advice about pregnancy and parenting.

Sudden Infant Death Syndrome

SIDS is the sudden unexpected death of a baby for no known reason. It is the most common cause of death for infants in Australia between birth and the age of one year. The risk of SIDS is greater if you smoke, use drugs and or alcohol during pregnancy and after your baby is born. For information, talk to your midwife, health worker or doctor.

