

## What are the dangers of sniffing?

The biggest danger from misusing these products is **INSTANT DEATH**.

Anyone experimenting with solvents is at risk from sudden death. Death can occur due to the following:

- **Heart failure:** This is when the heart becomes oversensitive to adrenaline and beats ineffectively.
- **Fatal accidents when 'high' or hallucinating:** Accidents can include the 'sniffer' being knocked down by a car or train, drowning, or falling from high buildings.
- **Burns and explosions:** Many of these products are highly flammable and if sniffed at the same time as smoking, or using a naked flame, can cause fires or may even explode.
- **Asphyxiation:** Can occur when the fumes replace all the oxygen in the body.
- **Choking on vomit**
- **Suffocation**

## Damage to the body

- Damage to the nervous system: involuntary twitching and numbness
- Breathing difficulties – damage to the lungs
- Liver damage
- Kidney damage
- Damage to the eye (optic atrophy)
- Damage to the inner ear (cochlea)
- Damage to reproductive systems - lowers sperm count
- Damage to the brain

National Information Line

01785 810762

Mon-Fri, 9am - 5pm  
(excluding public holidays)



**Re-Solv**

*about:*  
**'Sniffing'**

**Re-Solv**

Head Office  
30a High Street  
Stone  
Staffordshire  
ST15 8AW

Tel: 01785 817885  
Fax: 01785 813205  
Web: [www.re-solv.org](http://www.re-solv.org)  
Email: [information@re-solv.org](mailto:information@re-solv.org)

Re-Solv is a non-profit-making charitable company, limited by guarantee.

Registered Charity No: 326732  
Company Registration No: 1859082

**VSA**  
**VSA**



## What is solvent and volatile substance abuse (VSA)?

VSA is when solvents and volatile substances are inhaled through the mouth and/or nose for the sole purpose of getting a 'high.'

Volatile substances are depressants which slow down the activity of the brain and central nervous system. This results in messages to and from the brain being slowed down, affecting the physical, mental and emotional responses. But unlike other drugs, volatile substances are unique in the fact that they can also be stimulants and cause hallucinations.

## What are solvents & volatile substances?

Solvents and volatile substances are a range of products (many are everyday household items) that give off an intoxicating vapour.

There are more than a hundred commercially available products that are now used to get a 'high.' In the home there may be over thirty 'sniffable' products.

There are two ingredients that are candidates for 'sniffing' - solvents and gases. They are described as volatile substances because they readily evaporate at room temperature and in doing so give off a 'sniffable' vapour.

**The youngest recorded death from 'sniffing' was aged just 7 years old.**

## How do solvents and volatile substances work?

When the fumes/chemicals from products are breathed in on purpose, they are absorbed through the lungs into the bloodstream. The chemicals in solvents are fat soluble and so pass rapidly to the brain and other body organs, making the effects kick in very quickly.

Due to the rapid entry of the fumes/chemicals into the bloodstream through the lungs, the effect will kick in within 20-30 seconds and last for the next 30-40 minutes. However, the 'high' usually lasts only a few minutes.

The person sniffing solvents will often experience an initial feeling of euphoria, well-being and relaxation, as well as possible confusion and unsteadiness. The symptoms and effects from sniffing solvents are very similar to alcohol intoxication, although the speed of onset is much more rapid and can include the following:

- Drowsiness: the initial excitement is often followed by drowsiness
- Sickness
- Dizziness
- Slurred speech
- Loss of co-ordination
- Buzz - buzzing in the ears
- Light-headed - floaty feeling
- Chronic headaches
- Numbness and tingling in hands and feet
- Breathing difficulties
- Hallucinations
- Visual distortions - flashes of lights before the eyes
- Violent/aggressive behaviour
- Mood swings
- Loss of inhibitions
- Paranoia and anxiety
- Blackouts

**On average there is one death a week from 'sniffing.' Since 1971 when records began, it has claimed over 2,000 lives, with just under two thirds of these deaths under the age of 19, the most common age of death being 16.**

## Signs and Symptoms of 'Sniffing'

- 'Drunken' behaviour such as lack of coordination and coherence
- A chemical smell on their clothing, hair or breath
- Dilated pupils
- Pale complexion
- Red, puffy, watery eyes
- Persistent runny nose
- Rashes or spots around the nose and mouth (only occurs with certain products)
- Irritation of the throat with coughing or gagging
- Nausea/vomiting
- Headaches

Whilst 'sniffing' is not illegal, it is an offence to supply butane cigarette gas lighter refills to young people under the age of 18. Nitrous oxide (laughing gas) is classed under the Medicines Act and anyone over 18 can also buy it for use in cooking. There is currently no offence for possession of nitrous oxide. However, there may be legal implications if it is sold to minors.

