

Keeping yourself safe

- Always use a balloon to inhale. Inhaling directly from a dispenser, tube, or mask can be dangerous. Never inhale from a bag over the head.
- Be careful not to confuse nitrous oxide with another gas or volatile substance which can have greater risks.
- Do not inhale whilst standing up or where you could fall down and injure yourself (eg near a steep drop).
- If you have low blood pressure or mental health problems, nitrous oxide can make you ill.
- If you experience negative effects or 'pins and needles' stop using immediately.



About change, grow, live

Change, grow, live is a social care and health charity that works with individuals who want to change their lives for the better and achieve positive and life-affirming goals.

Find out more

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Change, grow, live (CGL) Registered Office: 3rd Floor, Tower Point, 44 North Road, Brighton BN1 1YR. Registered Charity Number 1079327 (England and Wales). Registered Charity Number SC039861 (Scotland). Company Registration Number 03861209 (England and Wales).



NPS - Your Questions Answered Nitrous Oxide



New Psychoactive Substances (NPS) can be created by slightly tweaking the molecular structure of existing illegal drugs. They can also be created from scratch using a variety of different chemicals.



Our mission is to help people change the direction of their lives, grow as a person and live life to its full potential.

Background

Nitrous oxide is a dissociative and central nervous system depressant drug that is inhaled. It is used to inflate balloons and in cooking (for example to aerate cream) so is easily available.

What is it?

We don't understand much about how nitrous oxide works on people but we think it impacts via the opiate system in the brain. It is absorbed via the pulmonary system, has a rapid onset, is short acting and is cleared from the body within a couple of hours.

Street names: laughing gas; hippie crack; whippets; chargers; bulbs etc.

Legal status: nitrous oxide is legal to sell to people over 18 when used in catering or for filling inflatables etc.

Nitrous oxide use is typically episodic at parties, festivals and previously in bars and clubs. Users may take multiple 'hits' or 'charges' over a few hours.

Nitrous oxide continues to be used as a pain killer by doctors, dentists and vets, including: in ambulances; as pain relief for pregnant women in labour; and during tooth extraction.

It is illegal to import or supply to people for recreational drug use under the Psychoactive Substances Act 2016, but is not illegal to use.

What are the effects?

Desired

- Immediate onset of euphoric effect after inhaling.
- Users typically experience laughing fits, relaxation, dizziness, auditory distortions and pleasant bodily feelings eg floating and tingling.
- There is disagreement in research whether it affects men and women differently.

Unwanted

- Common unwanted effects are dizziness, nausea and headaches after use.
- Usage can cause loss of control of body movement (ataxia).
- Some users feel dizzy and fall over, resulting in accidents.



What are the effects? (continued)

Harm

- Some deaths have occurred through asphyxiation (mainly through people putting plastic bags over their heads to inhale the drug then dying of lack of oxygen). Risk is increased because nitrous oxide blunts the normal response to oxygen deficiency by up to half.
- Accidents can occur through dizziness and falls.
- Repeated dosing or high dosing can cause red, sore eyes and irritate the respiratory tract resulting in coughing and excess salivation.
- Nitrous oxide replaces oxygen from the lungs and can cause irregular heartbeat.
- Heavy use can cause depletion of vitamin B12 that can result in anaemia (iron deficiency) and neuropathy (damage to nerves) and psychiatric symptoms.



What to do in an emergency

Stay with the person, call 999 and put them in the recovery position