

## Inhalants

The substances that may be posing the greatest danger to adolescents these days are sold at the local hardware store and commonly found in the home. Inhalants are breathable chemical vapors that produce mind-altering effects. Many people are not aware that products such as spray paints, nail polish remover, hair spray, glues, and cleaning fluids present a clear risk of abuse because of their intoxicating effects unrelated to their intended uses. Young people are likely to abuse inhalants because they are readily available and inexpensive.

The use of inhalants is deadly serious. Reports of deaths of first-time users are common; only alcohol use kills more young people. Nearly all abused inhalants produce effects similar to anesthetics, which act to slow down the body's functions. Sniffing highly concentrated amounts of chemicals in solvents or aerosol sprays can directly cause heart failure and death. The inhaled chemicals displace oxygen from the lungs and from the central nervous system, suffocating the user or causing lasting brain damage.

Other irreversible effects from inhalants include hearing loss, limb spasms, central nervous system or brain damage, and bone marrow damage. Serious, but potentially reversible effects include liver and kidney damage and blood oxygen depletion.

The abuse of inhalants is referred to as *huffing*, *sniffing*, *snorting*, or *bagging*. Signs that someone is using inhalants include flu-like symptoms, a drunken appearance, slurred speech, loss of coordination, bloodshot eyes, weight loss, sores or rashes around the nose and mouth and paint or other stains on the person's face, hands and clothing.