

## What they look like

Typical solvents are butane gas cigarette lighter refills, aerosols (air fresheners, hairsprays, deodorants and so on), disposable cigarette lighters, whipped cream cans, petrol, cleaning products, varnish, paint thinners, solvents, antifreeze, correcting fluid, nail-polish removers and cans or tubes of glue. Almost 2000 everyday household products can be misused.

## How they are taken

They are usually sniffed or breathed in using a cloth (or the sleeves of clothes), or by using a plastic bag, balloon or can. Solvents can also be abused by mixing them with alcohol. Users heat and breathe in substances or spray aerosols directly into the mouth. They also inject using needles and syringes.

## What they do

If you breathe in solvents, they are absorbed very quickly into the blood and the vapours reach the brain within a few seconds. Users can feel dizzy and light-headed or may experience a floating sensation, anxiety, feel sick or panic. Some users can also hallucinate.

## Addiction

Solvents contain physically addictive substances which can be psychologically addictive. Tolerance can build up within two to three days of continuously using solvents.



## How long do the effects last

The effects can last from a few minutes to 30 minutes.

## Risks

If you misuse solvents, this can make your heart highly sensitive to the effects of even normal levels of adrenaline. You can be at risk of this for several hours after you have used the substance. 'Sudden Sniffing Death' can happen the very first time somebody sniffs a solvent, but can happen any time someone abuses solvents. Solvent abuse can cause heart failure which can make reviving the person much more difficult.

### Short-term risks

- Vomiting
- Blackouts
- Mood swings
- Slurred speech
- 'Hangover' for several days
- Bad cough
- Spots and sores around the mouth
- Constant cold and red and runny eyes
- Burns and the risk of exploding solvents
- Poor judgement
- Poor co-ordination
- Strange behaviour
- Breathing in solvents using a plastic bag can cause people to suffocate. It is also extremely dangerous to squirt gas into your mouth, as this can cause sudden death.

### Long-term risks

- Violent excitement or emotion
- Damage to brain and mental abilities
- Damaged sight, hearing, liver, kidneys, lungs, the nervous and respiratory systems and reproductive organs

## What to do in an emergency

Don't delay – phone 999 immediately.

If you suspect someone has overdosed on drugs, tell the operator what drugs they've taken (if you know).

### What not to do

- Don't cause pain or another injury.
- Don't give them other drugs.
- Don't put them in a shower or bath.
- Don't walk them around.
- Don't leave them on their own.

Always follow the operator's instruction.

And remember, if you have any doubt **always** call 999. It could save the person's life.

### What the law says

It is illegal for retailers to sell butane gas refills to anyone under 18. It is also illegal for people to supply solvents, if they know that the person buying them will misuse them.

Under Scottish law you can be prosecuted for 'recklessly' selling substances to a person of any age, if you think they are going to breathe them in. If children abuse solvents they could be referred to the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (the welfare youth justice system for children in Scotland), who may arrange a children's hearing to decide if action should be taken.

### Getting more information

Phone the free and confidential 'Know the Score' information line on **0800 587 5879** to speak to a trained advisor. Someone is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Calls from landlines are free and will not show up on the phone bill. Or, you can visit the 'Know the Score' website at **[www.knowthescore.info](http://www.knowthescore.info)**.

Both the information line and the website can provide information about local services. Also, you can ask your GP to refer you to a specialist drugs service.

To find a drug service in your area visit **[www.scottishdrugservices.com](http://www.scottishdrugservices.com)**.

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