
THE TRUTH ABOUT
INHALANTS
Snappers
Shoot the breeze
Boppers
Air blast
Medusa
drugfreeworld.org

# WHY THIS BOOKLET WAS PRODUCED

You hear a lot of talk about drugs these days—at school, in the streets, on the internet and TV. Some of it is true, some not.

What you may not know is that much of what you hear about drugs actually comes from those selling them. Former dealers have said they would tell people anything to get them to buy drugs.

You need the real facts and the truth about drugs so you can make an informed decision about them. That is why we have prepared this booklet—for you.

Your feedback is important to us, so let us know what you think about this booklet. Visit us at **DrugFreeWorld.org** and email us at **info@drugfreeworld.org**.

# WHAT ARE INHALANTS?

The word *inhalants* refers to the vapors from toxic substances that are inhaled to reach a quick high.

These substances include solvents, aerosol sprays, gases and nitrites (prescription medicines used to lower blood pressure). According to the National Poison Data System, about 3,400 different products are now being abused as inhalants. These include common household and industrial products such as shoe polish, glue, gasoline, lighter fluid, whipped cream aerosols, nitrous oxide* (called *whippets* or *laughing gas*), spray paint, correction fluid, cleaning fluid, felt-tip marker fluid, paint thinners and other paint solvents.

Most inhalants act like anesthetics, which slow down the body's functions. After an initial high and loss of inhibition comes drowsiness, lightheadedness and agitation.

The chemicals are absorbed through the lungs into the bloodstream and quickly reach the brain and other organs. This can sometimes cause irreversible physical and mental damage.

Users inhale the chemical vapors directly from open containers (*sniffing*) or breathe fumes from rags soaked in chemicals (*huffing*). Some people spray substances directly into their nose or mouth, or pour chemicals onto their collar, sleeves or cuffs and sniff them periodically. In *bagging*, the user inhales fumes from a substance put inside a paper or plastic bag. Bagging in a closed area significantly increases the risk of suffocation.

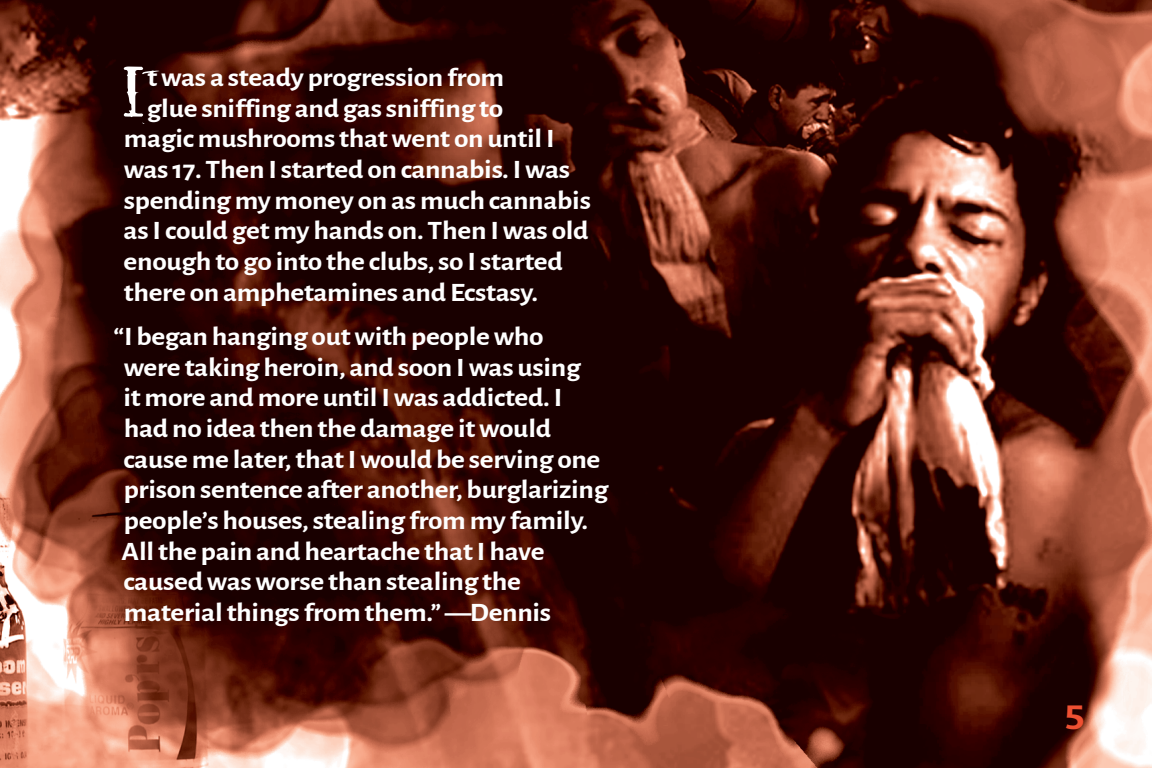


* nitrous oxide: a colorless, sweet-smelling gas used as an anesthetic

# STREET NAMES FOR INHALANTS

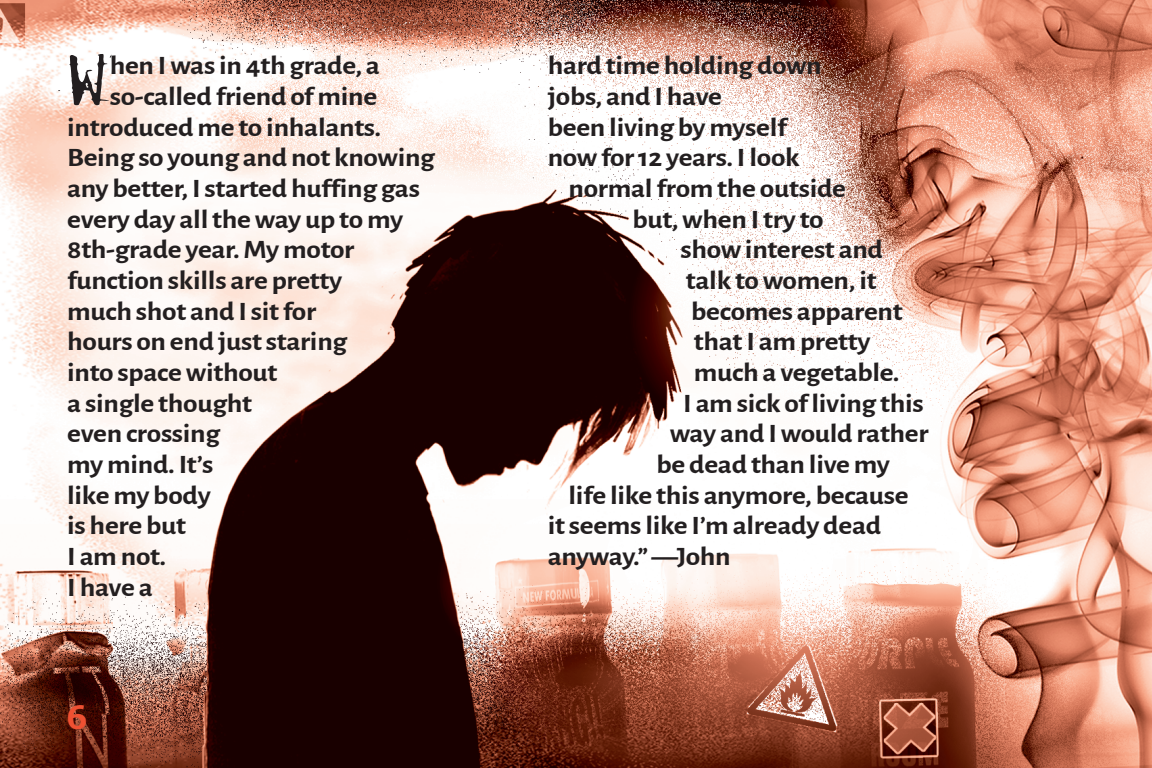
- Air Blast
- Ames
- Amys
- Aroma of Men
- Bolt
- Boppers
- Bullet
- Bullet Bolt
- Buzz Bomb
- Discorama
- Hardware
- Heart-on
- Highball
- Hippie Crack
- Huff
- Laughing Gas
- Locker Room
- Medusa
- Moon Gas
- Oz
- Pearls
- Poor Man's Pot
- Poppers
- Quicksilver
- Rush
- Satan's Secret
- Shoot the Breeze
- Snappers
- Snotballs
- Spray
- Texas Shoeshine
- Thrust
- Toilet Water
- Toncho
- Viagra in a Bottle
- Whippets
- Whiteout





It was a steady progression from glue sniffing and gas sniffing to magic mushrooms that went on until I was 17. Then I started on cannabis. I was spending my money on as much cannabis as I could get my hands on. Then I was old enough to go into the clubs, so I started there on amphetamines and Ecstasy.

"I began hanging out with people who were taking heroin, and soon I was using it more and more until I was addicted. I had no idea then the damage it would cause me later, that I would be serving one prison sentence after another, burglarizing people's houses, stealing from my family. All the pain and heartache that I have caused was worse than stealing the material things from them." —Dennis



When I was in 4th grade, a so-called friend of mine introduced me to inhalants. Being so young and not knowing any better, I started huffing gas every day all the way up to my 8th-grade year. My motor function skills are pretty much shot and I sit for hours on end just staring into space without a single thought even crossing my mind. It's like my body is here but I am not. I have a hard time holding down jobs, and I have been living by myself now for 12 years. I look normal from the outside but, when I try to show interest and talk to women, it becomes apparent that I am pretty much a vegetable. I am sick of living this way and I would rather be dead than live my life like this anymore, because it seems like I'm already dead anyway." —John

# HOW DO INHALANTS AFFECT YOUR BODY?

- Inhalants damage the heart, kidneys, brain, liver, bone marrow and other organs.
- ✖ Inhalants starve the body of oxygen and force the heart to beat irregularly and rapidly. They can damage the protective covering around nerve fibers as well as brain cells.
- ✖ Users may experience nausea, nosebleeds and loss of hearing, vision or smell. Chronic use can lead to muscle wasting, reduced muscle tone and lung and immune system damage.
- ✖ Users risk Sudden Sniffing Death Syndrome—where their heart stops beating. This can happen the first time or the hundredth time.



# SHORT-TERM EFFECTS



Most inhalants act directly on the nervous system to produce mind-altering effects. Within seconds, the user experiences intoxication and other reactions similar to those from alcohol. There are a variety of phenomena that may be experienced during or shortly after use, including:

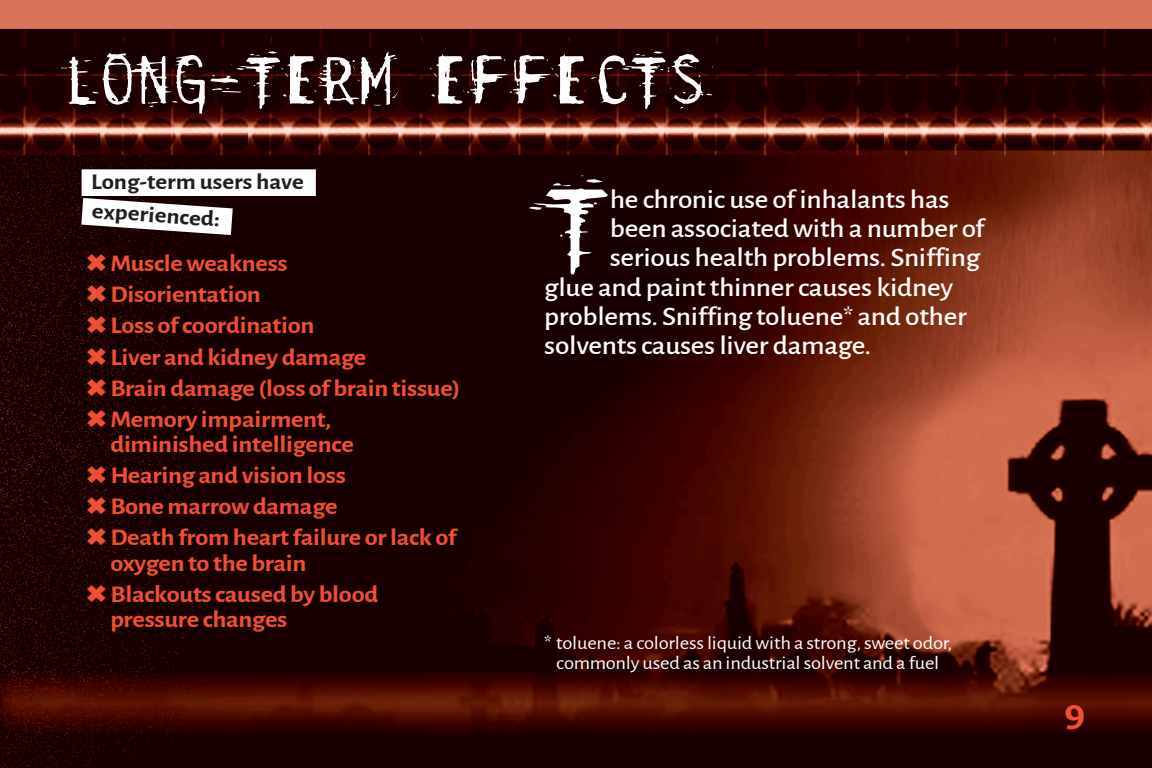
- Slurred speech
- Drunk, dizzy or dazed appearance
- Confusion
- Nausea
- Inability to coordinate movement
- Hallucinations and delusions
- Impaired judgment
- Unconsciousness
- Severe headaches
- Rashes around the nose and mouth
- Sudden Sniffing Death Syndrome (heart failure)
- Death from suffocation, seizures, coma or choking

# LONG-TERM EFFECTS

**Long-term users have experienced:**

- ✖ Muscle weakness
- ✖ Disorientation
- ✖ Loss of coordination
- ✖ Liver and kidney damage
- ✖ Brain damage (loss of brain tissue)
- ✖ Memory impairment, diminished intelligence
- ✖ Hearing and vision loss
- ✖ Bone marrow damage
- ✖ Death from heart failure or lack of oxygen to the brain
- ✖ Blackouts caused by blood pressure changes

The chronic use of inhalants has been associated with a number of serious health problems. Sniffing glue and paint thinner causes kidney problems. Sniffing toluene* and other solvents causes liver damage.



* toluene: a colorless liquid with a strong, sweet odor, commonly used as an industrial solvent and a fuel



Tomorrow is the sixth anniversary of our son Justin's death. He was 16. He died from inhaling air freshener, an act of inhalant abuse. His senseless death rocked the worlds of all who knew him. Justin was an honors student who loved life and embraced it with enthusiasm. He was a source of inspiration for many. I will always be haunted by the question of whether Justin would be with us today had he known about the risks he was taking." —Jackie

# ARE INHALANTS ADDICTIVE?

Inhalants can be physically and psychologically addictive. Users report a strong urge to continue using inhalants, especially after continued usage over many days.

A person abusing inhalants frequently builds up a tolerance, meaning they need more of the substance to get high, increasing the risk of overdose.

Habitual users coming off inhalants suffer withdrawal symptoms, which can include nausea, excessive sweating, muscle cramps, headaches, chills, agitation, shaking and hallucinations. In severe cases, withdrawal can cause convulsions.





# INTERNATIONAL STATISTICS

Inhalant abuse is a problem that affects countries around the world.

- In one year alone in the United States, 2.4 million people used some form of inhalant within a year. About 6 percent of current American 8th graders reported inhalant use.
- According to research into Medical Examiner reports, there are over 500 inhalant-caused deaths in the US annually.
- Inhalant abuse is one of the most common forms of drug abuse in the 11–15 age group in England and Wales. It is estimated that 3.5–10 percent of young people have at least experimented with volatile solvents, and that 15,000–30,000 are current users.
- In the United Kingdom, 39 percent of inhalant-related deaths occurred on the victim's first attempt.
- In Australia, 33 percent of inhalant users consumed these substances more frequently than other drugs—at least monthly.

- Research on substance abuse among children living on the streets in various countries shows that 47 percent were lifetime users of inhalants. Some 58 percent of street children in Kenya reported sniffing glue in the past month.
- In a study of more than 22,000 cases of inhalant poisonings treated in hospital emergency rooms, about 10 percent of the patients ended up in intensive care and another 8 percent were referred to psychiatric units.
- According to the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs, which gathers data from students in 35 European countries, 7.2 percent of the students have tried inhalants at least once. The countries with the highest proportions of students who tried inhalants were Latvia (16 percent), Germany and Croatia (15 percent each).

**In Karachi, Pakistan, 80 to 90% of street kids sniff glue or solvents.**

80-90%

**22% of inhalant abusers who died had no history of previous inhalant abuse.**

22%






**For three days, a friend gave me glue free of cost. On the fourth day, he asked for money from me. By then, I was addicted and I had to give him money to get a tube of glue. I needed several tubes of glue daily." —Marty**

# DIFFERENT TYPES OF INHALANTS

Inhalants can be categorized into four different types:

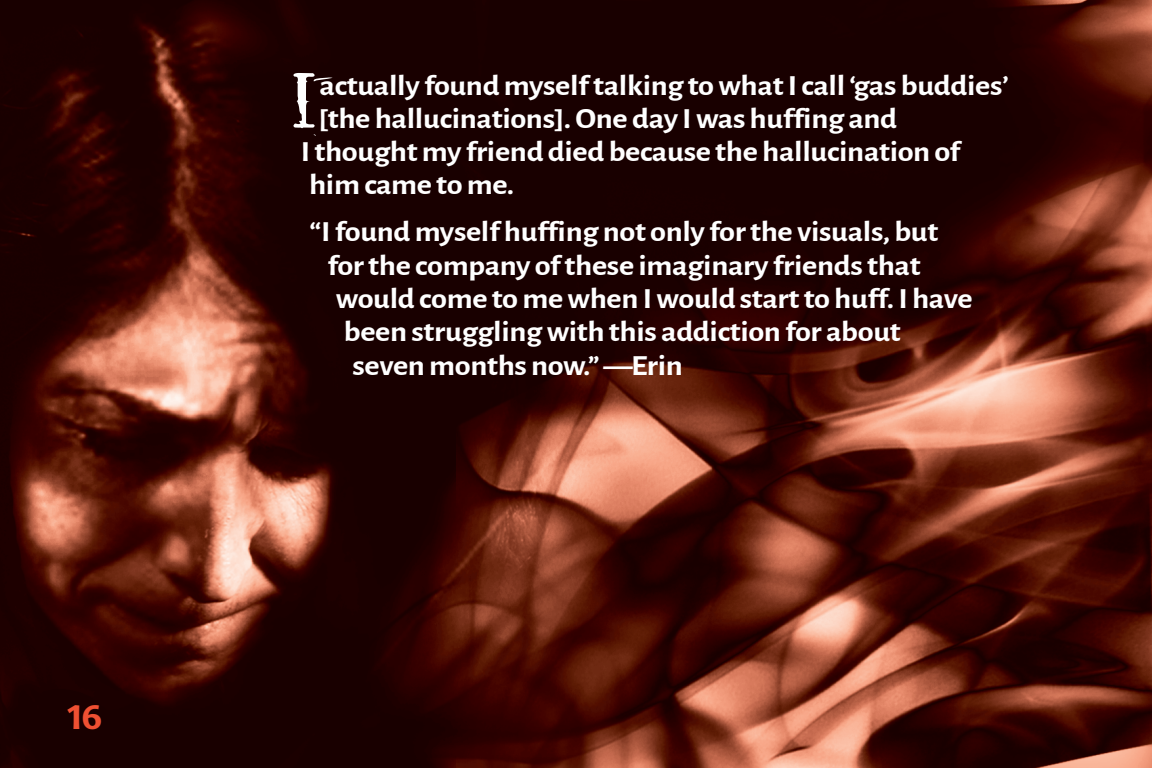
**LIQUIDS** that vaporize at room temperatures. These are found in easily available household and industrial products including paint thinners, degreasers, gasoline, glues, correction fluids and felt-tip marker fluids.

**SPRAYS** such as spray paints, deodorant and hair sprays, vegetable oil sprays for cooking and fabric protector sprays.

**GASES** including medical anesthetics (ether, chloroform and nitrous oxide, commonly called *laughing gas*), butane lighters, propane tanks, whipped cream dispensers and refrigerants.

**NITRITES** chemical compounds found in food preservatives, leather cleaner, room deodorizers, etc. They are used mainly as sexual enhancers and are commonly known as *poppers* or *snappers*.





I actually found myself talking to what I call 'gas buddies' [the hallucinations]. One day I was huffing and I thought my friend died because the hallucination of him came to me.

"I found myself huffing not only for the visuals, but for the company of these imaginary friends that would come to me when I would start to huff. I have been struggling with this addiction for about seven months now." —Erin

# ARE INHALANTS LEGAL?

Although inhalants are not regulated under the Controlled Substances Act, over a dozen states in the US have placed restrictions on the sale and distribution to minors of certain products that are commonly abused as inhalants. Some states have introduced fines, incarceration or mandatory treatment for the sale, distribution, use and/or possession of inhalant chemicals.

Laws also exist in some US states prohibiting the recreational inhalation of nitrous oxide (laughing gas).

Western Australia, South Australia, Victoria, Queensland and the Northern Territory have passed laws making it an offense to sell products to anyone the seller believes will use them for the purpose of inhaling. Police are allowed to search a person who is reasonably believed to be in possession of an inhalant and confiscate it.

In England and Wales, it is illegal for retailers to sell volatile substances to anyone if there is reason to believe they will use it for inhalation and intoxication purposes.





# INHALANTS:



Ancient cultures in Egypt, Babylonia (present-day Iraq), India and China used vapors to alter consciousness or as part of religious ceremonies.

According to some researchers, priestesses at the Temple of Apollo* in Delphi (a city in ancient Greece) are believed to have inhaled gas vapors to alter their state of consciousness during their rituals.

In the early 1800s, commonly used anesthetics like nitrous oxide, ether and chloroform were used as intoxicants.

Nitrous oxide was regarded as a cheap substitute for alcohol and was popularized by the British scientist Sir Humphry Davy. He held nitrous oxide parties and coined the term *laughing gas* in 1799. Noting the anesthetic effects, Davy proposed that the gas could be used for operations, although this was not tried for another half-century.

The use of anesthetics for recreational purposes continued throughout the 19th century in Europe and the US.

* The Greeks believed that the god Apollo gave prophesies through priestesses at the Temple of Apollo, an ancient shrine.

# A SHORT HISTORY



Sir Humphry Davy

In the 1920s, ether became a substitute for alcohol and was a recreational drug during the Prohibition Era in the US.

In the 1940s, solvent abuse, mainly gasoline sniffing, gained popularity.

Abuse of inhalants in the United States increased in the 1950s and is now widespread among adolescents.

By the 1960s, widespread solvent sniffing included products like paint and lacquer thinners, nail polish remover, shoe polish, lighter fluid, spray paint and glue.

In recent decades, inhalant abuse has become a major issue among homeless children worldwide, including in South Asia, Mexico, Eastern Europe and Kenya. Street kids use these inhalants to numb the pain of hunger, cold and desperation.

Gas and spray paint sniffing is also common in remote regions in Canada, America, Australia, New Zealand and some Pacific islands.



# The Truth About Drugs

Drugs are essentially poisons. The amount taken determines the effect.

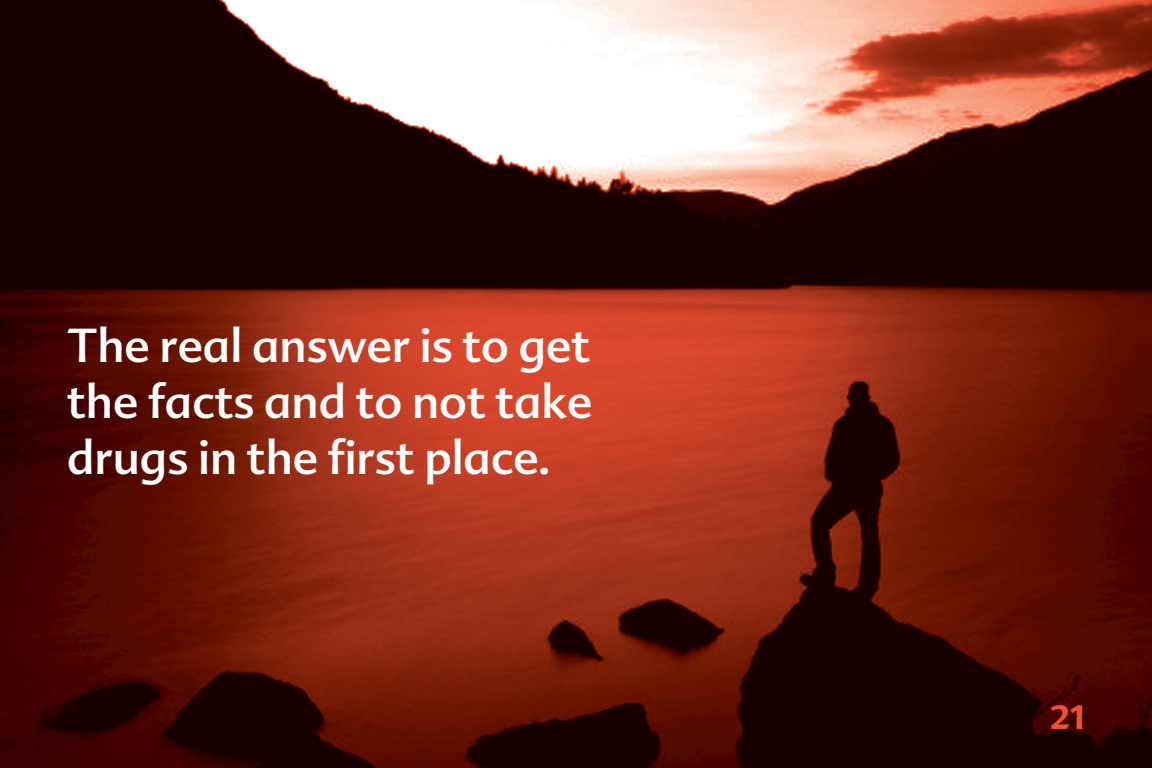
A small amount acts as a stimulant (speeds you up). A greater amount acts as a sedative (slows you down). An even larger amount poisons and can kill.

This is true of any drug. Only the amount needed to achieve the effect differs.

But many drugs have another liability: they directly affect the mind. They can distort the user's perception of what is happening around him or her. As a result, the person's actions may be odd, irrational, inappropriate and even destructive.

Drugs block off all sensations, the desirable ones along with the undesirable. So, while providing short-term help in the relief of pain, they also wipe out ability and alertness and muddy one's thinking.

Medicines are drugs that are intended to speed up, slow down or change something about the way your body is working to try to make it work better. Sometimes they are necessary. But they are still drugs: they act as stimulants or sedatives, and too much can kill you. So if you do not use medicines as they are supposed to be used, they can be as dangerous as illegal drugs.


The real answer is to get
the facts and to not take
drugs in the first place.

# WHY DO PEOPLE TAKE DRUGS?

People take drugs because they want to change something in their lives.

Here are some of the reasons young people have given for taking drugs:

- To fit in
- To escape or relax
- To relieve boredom
- To seem grown-up
- To rebel
- To experiment

They think drugs are a solution. But eventually, drugs become the problem.

Difficult as it may be to face one's problems, the consequences of drug use are always worse than the problem one is trying to solve with them. The real answer is to get the facts and to not take drugs in the first place.



**Millions of copies of booklets such as this have been distributed to people around the world in over 20 languages.**




As new drugs appear on the streets and more information about their effects becomes known, existing booklets are updated and new ones created.

The booklets are published by the Foundation for a Drug-Free World, a nonprofit public benefit organization headquartered in Los Angeles, California.

The foundation provides educational materials, advice and coordination for its international drug prevention network. It works with youth, parents, educators, volunteer organizations and government agencies—anyone with an interest in helping people lead lives free from drug abuse.

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**REFERENCES:**

For the references used to compile this booklet, go to DrugFreeWorld.org/refs.

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# FACTS YOU NEED TO KNOW

This booklet is one in a series of publications that covers the facts about marijuana, alcohol, fentanyl, synthetic drugs, Ecstasy, cocaine, crack cocaine, crystal meth and methamphetamine, inhalants, heroin, LSD and prescription drug abuse. Armed with this information, the reader can make the decision to live a drug-free life.

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