

Nitrites

Amyl, butyl, hardware, liquid gold, locker room, poppers, ram, rock hard, rush, snapper, stag, stud, thrust, TNT

What are nitrites?

Amyl, butyl and isobutyl nitrite (collectively known as alkyl nitrites or poppers) are clear, yellow liquids which are inhaled for their intoxicating effects.

In the UK nitrites are usually sold as a gold coloured liquid in a small bottle.

There are many different brand names, such as THT and liquid gold. The liquid is inhaled either straight from the bottle or from a cloth.



Nitrites

Nitrites originally came as small glass capsules that were popped open. This led to nitrites being given the name '**poppers**' but this form of the drug is rarely found in the UK

Nitrites tend to have a sweet odour when fresh but this tends to turn to a 'dirty socks' smell when stale. In the UK, it is largely butyl nitrite which is sold in sex shops, pubs, clubs and sometimes tobacconists or clothes shops, retailing at up to £5 a bottle.

UK situation

Nitrites have now become more widely used than just in the gay community, especially among teenagers. A recent survey of 16 year olds in the North West of England found that over 20% of them claimed to have used nitrites. Nitrites have become popular in the dance/rave scene either used by themselves or in combination with other drugs.

History

Amyl nitrite was discovered in 1857 and used to ease chest pains (angina). In recent years it has been replaced by other medicines and its only remaining medical use is as an antidote for cyanide poisoning.

Nitrites became popular in showbiz circles in the 1950s and as a street drug in America in the 1960s. Butyl nitrite has no medical uses and was originally sold in America as a room odouriser and aphrodisiac.

The drug became popular in the UK first on the disco/club scene of the 1970s and then at dance and rave venues in the 1980s and 1990s

The law

Most nitrites are not illegal to manufacture, supply or be in possession of and they are not controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act. Those selling poppers have also escaped prosecution under the Medicines Act on the basis that nitrites were being sold as 'room deodorisers' and not medicines. However, although the law hasn't changed, both a recent European Union directive and a decision of the Medicines Control Agency (who administer the Medicines Act) means that any substance on sale with a psychoactive or mood-altering effect could be classed as a medicine (whatever it is sold) and so be controlled under the Medicines Act.

Effects/risks

The effects start soon after inhalation but only last for a few minutes. People experience a 'rush' as heartbeat quickens and blood rushes to the head. A pounding headache, dizziness, nausea, a slowed down sense of time, a flushed face and neck and a feeling of light headedness are commonly reported effects. People using nitrites for sexual pleasure often report a prolonged sensation of orgasm and prevention of premature ejaculation, although some men have also reported problems achieving an erection. Nitrites also relax the anal muscles making anal intercourse easier. The fact that some people use nitrites for sexual pleasure may make it more difficult to practice safer sex whilst high.

Users can lose consciousness especially if they are engaged in vigorous physical activity such as dancing or running. Nitrite use has also led to heart attacks when people already have heart or blood pressure problems. There have also been cases of fatalities when people have drunk nitrites rather than inhaling the vapours.

Nitrites also increase pressure on the eye ball and are dangerous for people to use if they have the eye disease, glaucoma. Nitrites are often used in combination with other drugs. Some people say they help boost drug effects but any combination of drugs can be dangerous and lead to unpredictable effects. Regular use can result in people experiencing skin problems around the nose and lips.

Regular users may also find tolerance develops and that use of nitrites no longer brings on a high. Long term use may lead to psychological dependence but there are no reports of physical dependence or withdrawal symptoms.

Some people have linked the use of nitrites to the development of a rare cancer called Kaposi's sarcoma, one of the earliest symptoms of AIDS in those gay men who are HIV positive. However, the evidence for this link is not established.

Other Sources of information

<p>Local organisations that offer Assessment & Treatment options for people with addictions:</p> <p>EDAS – Mental Health and Alcohol & Substance Misuse Support in Poole Tel 01202 735777 hello@edasuk.org www.edasuk.org</p> <p>EDAS/REACH YP – Free and confidential drug and alcohol service for under 25s who live in the Borough of Poole and County of Dorset Tel 0800 0434656 www.edasuk.org/yp</p> <p>WE ARE WITH YOU Tel 01202558855 www.wearewithyou.org.uk</p> <p>EDP Tel 01305 571264 info@edp.org.uk</p>		<p>National organisations that offer treatment, advice, information & support for people with addictions:</p> <p>ALCOHOL CHANGE Tel 020 3907 8480 www.alcoholchange.org.uk</p> <p>FRANK Tel 0300 1236600 Text 82111 www.talktofrank.com</p>
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Contact us: Helpline 01202 735777 (Weekdays 8:30am to 4:00pm, 24-hour answer phone)

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