

Amyl nitrite●

What is amyl nitrite?

Amyl nitrite is a depressant which means it slows down the messages travelling between the brain and body. Classified as an inhalant, it belongs to a class of drugs known as alkyl nitrites, which also includes butyl nitrite, isobutyl nitrite and isopropyl nitrite.¹

Amyl nitrite is a vasodilator. Vasodilators are medicines that cause the blood vessels in the body to dilate and the involuntary smooth muscles to relax, lowering blood pressure.^{2,3}

Other names

Poppers, Jungle Juice, liquid gold, rush, purple haze and buzz.

How is it used?

Amyl nitrite was used medically in the past for the treatment of angina, and has been used for the treatment of cyanide poisoning.^{3,4}

Recreationally, it is used to enhance sexual experience or to experience a general sense of pleasure. The effects are usually felt straight away, and last for around 2-5 minutes.³

What does it look like?

Amyl nitrite is an extremely flammable and highly volatile oil, that is clear or yellowish in colour and is commonly inhaled from a small glass bottle.^{2,4} It typically has a distinct smell similar to dirty socks.⁴ Historically, amyl nitrite has been primarily used by men who have sex with men.⁵ This trend is still common; however, it has also become a common 'party drug' that is used more widely.⁶

Effects of amyl nitrite

There is no safe level of drug use. Use of any drug always carries some risk. It's important to be careful when taking any type of drug.

Amyl nitrite will affect everyone differently, based on:

- size, weight and health
- whether the person is used to taking it
- whether other drugs are taken around the same time
- the amount taken
- the strength of the drug
- amount of fresh air breathed while inhaling
- amount of physical activity before and after inhaling.

The effects of amyl nitrate include:

- initial 'rush' of euphoria
- flushing of the face
- increased heart rate
- dizziness
- warming sensations
- feelings of excitement
- involuntary muscle relaxation, especially the anal and vaginal sphincter
- nausea
- headaches
- low blood pressure
- slowed breathing
- skin irritation
- blurred vision
- nose bleeds
- psychological effects can include increased sensual awareness, visual distortions, lowered inhibitions and impaired judgement.^{2,3,7,8}

Headaches are common once the 'high' passes.³

Long-term effects

The level of harm from the long term use of amyl nitrite is generally low, however some of the long term effects can range from mild allergic reactions to potentially life threatening methaemoglobinaemia – a blood disorder that can lead to inadequate oxygen supply to body tissue.⁹ Frequent use can also cause a rash to form around the mouth, nose and eyes, or any skin that regularly comes into contact with the vapour.¹⁰ This can look like a skin irritation. Direct fluid contact with skin can cause burns and should be avoided.⁸ People who are anaemic, pregnant, have a heart condition, have high blood pressure, or have increased pressure within the skull (head injury or brain haemorrhage) should avoid using amyl nitrite as this can increase the risk of harmful effects.^{3, 11} There is also a rare risk of maculopathy (loss of vision) most commonly associated with isopropyl nitrite, and for people who have underlying glaucoma there is a risk of fluid pressure build-up within the eye.^{3, 8, 12}

Using amyl nitrite with other drugs

The effects of using amyl nitrite with other drugs – including over-the-counter or prescribed medications – can be unpredictable and dangerous, and could include:

- **Amyl nitrite + Viagra or other erectile dysfunction medications:** a high risk that the person will lose consciousness due to a sudden and extreme drop in blood pressure.¹¹ This may require immediate medical attention – call 000 in case of emergency.
- **Amyl nitrite + amphetamine:** increased strain on the heart placing the body under additional stress.¹¹

Withdrawal

Regular use of amyl nitrite use does not result in dependence. People who use it regularly should not experience withdrawal symptoms, however it may take a few days for their body to get used to not having the drug in their system.³

Health and safety

Some people are unaware of how amyl nitrite should be used and incorrect use can be fatal.⁸ Amyl nitrite liquid should not be ingested i.e. do not swallow, as it is a highly poisonous substance that can lead to blindness, brain damage, organ failure and death.³ It is a powerful irritant that can lead to burns to the face, skin and eyes.⁸

Getting help

If your use of amyl nitrite is affecting your health, family, relationships, work, school, financial or other life situations, you can find help and support.

Help and support services directory:

adf.org.au/help-support/support-services-directory/

Amyl nitrite and the law

Inhalant use is not a criminal offence in any Australian state or territory.¹³

In recent years, some Australian states and territories have revised police powers to intervene in inhalant use in two main ways. Police are authorised to:

- take away inhalants and related equipment
- pick up young people who are using inhalants, and release them into the care of a responsible person, or a place of safety.¹³

It is also illegal in some states and territories to sell or supply products to someone if they believe they are to be used for inhaling.¹⁴

Currently Amyl Nitrite is a schedule 4 drug that requires a prescription for use.¹² As of February 2020, the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) have chosen to down-schedule Amyl Nitrite to a schedule 3 medicine so that people will be able to purchase it from a pharmacist without needing a prescription.¹²

State/territory legislation on inhalant sales

It is an offence in Queensland, Western Australia, Victoria, South Australia, and the Northern Territory to knowingly supply an inhalant to a person for the purpose of intentional inhalation.¹⁴

See also, drugs and the law:

adf.org.au/talking-about-drugs/law/

Amyl nitrite statistics

- In 2016, 4.2% of Australians aged 14 years or older had used inhalants in their lifetime.¹⁵
- Between 2001 and 2016, general inhalant use among Australians aged 14 years or older has increased from 0.4% to 1%.¹⁵
- In 2009, the prevalence of amyl nitrite use among gay and homosexually active men was at 32%.¹⁶

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Always call an ambulance on triple zero (000) if an overdose is suspected: tell the paramedic exactly what has been taken. Paramedics are there to help and will not involve the police unless there is a danger to themselves or others.

Other help, support services and resources

Links to further help and support • adf.org.au/help-support/

● Further information

DrugInfo • 1300 85 85 84

Free confidential information and advice about alcohol and other drugs (9am - 5pm, Mon-Fri)

Family Drug Help • 1300 660 068 • www.familydrughelp.com.au (Victorian-based)

Services are available to support those around you who may be affected by your drug use. As well as providing understanding, they can provide information about how best to help during treatment.

Family Drug Support • 1300 368 186 • www.fds.org.au (Australia-wide)



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