

Student Handout: The Dangers of Nitrous Oxide (Laughing Gas) and Solvent Abuse

What is Nitrous Oxide?

- Nitrous oxide, also known as "laughing gas," is a colorless gas commonly used for medical purposes as an anesthetic in surgeries and dental procedures.
 - It is also used in the food industry as a propellant in whipped cream canisters and as a recreational drug for its short-lasting euphoric effects.
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Key Dangers of Nitrous Oxide Abuse:

1. Neurological Damage:

- Prolonged use of nitrous oxide can lead to **Vitamin B12 deficiency**, resulting in nerve damage, numbness, and even paralysis.
- Chronic users often experience **tingling in hands and feet** due to damaged nerves (peripheral neuropathy).

2. Cardiovascular Risks:

- Repeated use can increase **homocysteine levels** in the body, which elevates the risk of blood clots and heart issues like heart attacks.

3. Respiratory Hazards:

- Inhalation of nitrous oxide in a confined space or without proper oxygen can result in **asphyxiation** (suffocation), leading to unconsciousness or even death.

4. Psychological Effects:

- While short-term use may create feelings of euphoria, chronic use can lead to **memory loss, disorientation**, and even **psychosis**.

5. Legal Consequences:

- As of November 2023, in the UK, **nitrous oxide is classified as a Class C drug**, meaning possession and sale for recreational use is illegal. Violators may face fines, community service, or even imprisonment.
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How to Protect Yourself:

- **Be Aware of Peer Pressure:** Nitrous oxide use is increasingly common at parties, especially among young people. Remember, just because others are doing it doesn't make it safe or legal.

- **Know the Risks:** Understand that using nitrous oxide can have long-term health effects, including irreversible nerve and heart damage.
 - **Get Help if Needed:** If you or someone you know is using nitrous oxide or other solvents regularly, it's important to seek help. Talk to a trusted adult or health professional.
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Harm Reduction Tips:

- **Avoid Use:** The safest option is not to use nitrous oxide recreationally.
 - **Stay Educated:** Be informed about the short- and long-term consequences of nitrous oxide and solvent abuse.
 - **Support Others:** If you notice a friend engaging in this risky behavior, encourage them to seek support.
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Resources for Help:

- **Re-Solv:** A UK charity dedicated to preventing solvent abuse (www.re-solv.org)
 - **Talk to a Counselor:** Speak to a school counselor or healthcare professional if you have concerns about yourself or someone else.
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Stay Safe!

Make informed choices about your health and well-being, and remember: just because something seems harmless, it doesn't mean it is.

This handout provides essential information about the dangers of nitrous oxide and solvent abuse. Share this knowledge with others and help spread awareness.