

PREVENTION & RECOVERY

Know the Risks

Nitrous oxide may seem less dangerous because it has legitimate medical and culinary uses, but recreational inhalation is not the same as receiving nitrous oxide under medical supervision.

When Use Becomes a Concern

Signs that nitrous oxide use may be becoming problematic include:

- Using more often or in larger amounts
- Repeatedly using because the effects wear off quickly
- Feeling strong urges or cravings to use
- Continuing despite physical or mental health problems
- Spending increasing amounts of time or money obtaining and using nitrous oxide
- Trying to stop or reduce use but having difficulty doing so
- Continuing to use despite numbness, weakness, or other neurological symptoms.

Psychological dependence can occur with repeated nitrous oxide use.



GET HELP WHEN YOU NEED IT

If someone becomes unconscious, has a seizure, has difficulty breathing, or cannot be awakened after inhaling nitrous oxide, **call 911 immediately.**

If you have recently used nitrous oxide and develop persistent numbness, tingling, weakness, difficulty walking, or other neurological symptoms, seek medical care and tell the healthcare provider about your nitrous oxide use. This information can be important for diagnosis and treatment.

For questions about a possible poisoning or exposure, contact **Poison Control at 1-800-222-1222.**

For help finding substance use treatment, call the **SAMHSA National Helpline at 1-800-662-HELP (4357)** or visit **FindTreatment.gov.**

TEST YOURSELF

1. What is nitrous oxide?
 - A. A form of nicotine
 - B. A gas with legitimate medical and culinary uses that may also be misused recreationally
 - C. A type of opioid
 - D. A harmless dietary supplement
2. Why can repeated nitrous oxide use damage the nervous system?
 - A. It can interfere with vitamin B12 function
 - B. It permanently increases vitamin C
 - C. It only causes dehydration
 - D. It increases calcium absorption
3. Which symptom could indicate neurological damage associated with nitrous oxide use?
 - A. Improved coordination
 - B. Increased appetite
 - C. Persistent numbness, weakness, or difficulty walking
 - D. Temporary thirst
4. Why can inhaling high concentrations of nitrous oxide be dangerous?
 - A. It can displace oxygen and cause loss of consciousness or asphyxiation
 - B. It contains caffeine
 - C. It always causes an allergic reaction
 - D. It permanently increases blood oxygen levels
5. What should someone do if they develop persistent weakness, numbness, or difficulty walking after using nitrous oxide?
 - A. Continue using it in smaller amounts
 - B. Wait several months before mentioning it
 - C. Seek medical attention and tell the healthcare provider about the nitrous oxide use
 - D. Take an energy drink

Answers: 1: B, 2: A, 3: C, 4: A, 5: C.



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STAY SAFE SERIES

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N2O WHIPPETS



A QUICK HIGH CAN HAVE LASTING CONSEQUENCES

UNDERSTANDING NITROUS OXIDE

Nitrous oxide (N₂O), commonly called “laughing gas,” is a colorless gas used medically for anesthesia, pain relief, and sedation. It is also used as a propellant in products such as whipped-cream dispensers..

When nitrous oxide is intentionally inhaled for its psychoactive effects, it may be called:

- Whippets or whippits
- NOS
- Nangs
- Laughing gas
- Galaxy Gas or other commercial product names

Nitrous oxide can produce a brief feeling of euphoria, relaxation, dizziness, or altered perception. Because these effects usually disappear within minutes, some people may repeatedly inhale the gas in a short period of time.

LEGAL DOES NOT MEAN HARMLESS

Nitrous oxide has legitimate medical, industrial, and culinary uses, which makes it relatively accessible. However, products intended for food preparation or other commercial purposes are not intended to be recreationally inhaled.

In 2025, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) warned consumers not to inhale nitrous oxide products recreationally because misuse has been associated with serious health effects, including neurological injury and death.

WHAT CAN NITROUS OXIDE DO TO THE BODY?

Short-Term Effects

Nitrous oxide acts rapidly on the brain and nervous system. Recreational inhalation may cause:

Euphoria or a “high”

- Dizziness or lightheadedness
- Confusion or disorientation
- Impaired judgment
- Loss of coordination
- Headache
- Tingling or numbness
- Changes in perception
- Low blood pressure
- Loss of consciousness

Nitrous oxide can also displace oxygen. Inhaling high concentrations can prevent the brain, heart, and other organs from receiving enough oxygen.

This can lead to:

- Fainting
- Seizures
- Injury from falls
- Loss of consciousness
- Asphyxiation
- Coma
- Death

Cold Burns & Frostbite

Nitrous oxide stored under pressure becomes extremely cold when released. Direct exposure to compressed gas can cause severe cold burns or frostbite involving the mouth, lips, throat, skin, or airways.



THE VITAMIN B12 CONNECTION

One of the most serious risks of repeated nitrous oxide use involves vitamin B12.

Nitrous oxide chemically inactivates vitamin B12, interfering with processes the body needs to maintain healthy nerves and produce myelin—the protective covering surrounding nerve fibers.

This means a person can develop a functional vitamin B12 deficiency, sometimes even when a standard blood test shows a seemingly normal B12 level.

Repeated or heavy exposure can contribute to nerve and spinal cord damage.

Warning Signs of Neurological Injury

Seek medical attention if nitrous oxide use is followed by:

- Persistent numbness or tingling
- Weakness in the arms or legs
- Difficulty walking
- Poor balance or coordination
- Unusual sensations in the hands or feet
- Bladder or bowel problems
- Memory or concentration problems

Severe cases have been associated with peripheral neuropathy and subacute combined degeneration of the spinal cord, a neurological disorder caused by damage to the spinal cord's protective myelin.

Recovery can take weeks or months, and neurological damage may not always completely resolve.

