

AMYL NITRITE

What is amyl nitrite?

Amyl nitrite is one of the nitrite class of drugs. Others include butyl nitrite, isobutyl nitrite and the nitrates such as nitro-glycerine. Amyl nitrite is a vasodilator, meaning it dilates blood vessels.

It is a clear, yellow, highly volatile and inflammable liquid. The liquid smells sweet and fruity when fresh but like 'sweaty socks' when stale. Amyl nitrite is also known as 'poppers'.

Amyl nitrite was discovered in 1857 and was used for a variety of medical applications. Used to relieve severe constricting chest pain caused by angina pectoris, physicians soon found amyl nitrite to be unreliable and turned to other substances, particularly nitro-glycerine, as the medicine of choice.

Amyl nitrite is now used clinically only when the very rapid absorption through inhalation is necessary for some cardiac medical procedures. It is also used to treat cyanide poisoning.

In clinical settings, amyl nitrite is prepared in small ampoules that are crushed, freeing the vapours to be inhaled. The effects are felt within 30 seconds of inhalation and last for two to three minutes. A typical therapeutic dose is 0.3 ml.

The nitrites usually comes as a liquid, contained in small bottles. Recreational users inhale the fumes from the bottle in 'snorts'.

It became fashionable to use amyl nitrite in the 1950s within show business circles. The gay community, who discovered the drug in the sixties due to its alleged sex enhancing properties, still use it extensively today. More recently amyl nitrite has found its way into straight clubs and dance parties where they are used in conjunction with other 'party drugs' such as speed and ecstasy.

How many people use amyl nitrite?

In Australia no information is collected specifically on the use of amyl nitrite, but in a recent NDARC ecstasy survey 75% of those surveyed had ever experimented with amyl. Amyl nitrite is classified as an inhalant and according to the 2001 National Drug Household Survey, 3% of the Australian population reported using an inhalant at some time, with less than 1% having used them in the last 12 months.

The average age at first use was 17.6 years.

The 1999 Secondary School Survey indicated that inhalants were one of the more popular drug types with young people attending high school across Australia. Twenty six per cent of 12-17 year olds had ever experimented with inhalants.

- **17% of 17 year old males reported ever using inhalants**
- **14% of 17 year old females reported ever using inhalants**
- **32% of 12 year old males reported ever using inhalants**
- **37% of 12 year old males reported ever using inhalants**

Other names for amyl nitrite?

When first used as a medicine amyl nitrite came in a small glass capsule encased in cotton wool. This was crushed between the fingers resulting in a popping noise – giving the drug their street name - ‘poppers’.

Butyl and isobutyl nitrites have been sold under many names and have been sold as many things to avoid the eyes of the law. They have been sold as room odorizers or air fresheners with names such as ‘Rush’, ‘Climax’, ‘Ram’, ‘Thrust’ and ‘Heart-on’.

What are the short-term effects of amyl nitrite?

The short-term effects of using amyl nitrite may include:

- **light-headedness and giddiness**
- **increased sensual awareness**
- **removal of inhibitions**
- **skin sensitivity**
- **headache**
- **nose bleeds**
- **lose consciousness**

What are the long-term effects of amyl nitrite?

The long-term effects of using amyl nitrite may include:

Compared to many drugs, amyl nitrite has less toxicity as long as it inhaled as intended. However, use of nitrites should be avoided by people who are anaemic, pregnant women and those with high blood pressure or a history of cerebral haemorrhaging.

There are no recorded sudden deaths from inhaling nitrites. While the possibility of death or serious injury from inhaling is fairly remote, there is a major toxicity problem with nitrites if they are swallowed rather than inhaled. When they are eaten nitrites can cause major medical problems by interfering with the ability of the blood to transport oxygen. Oral consumption of nitrites has led to death in some circumstances.

Combining amyl and Viagra is also problematic, causing loss of consciousness, and in some circumstances – death. It is also believed that regular use of the drug could reduce the effectiveness of HIV drugs.