

# THE TRUTH ABOUT INHALANTS

A woman with long blonde hair is shown from the side, smoking a cigarette. A large, glowing orange-red smoke ring in the shape of a skull is centered in the frame, partially obscuring her face. She is wearing a dark t-shirt with the word "HAZE" printed on it.

Snappers  
Shoot the breeze  
Boppers

Air blast  
Medusa

[drugfreeworld.org](http://drugfreeworld.org)

## **WHY THIS BOOKLET WAS PRODUCED**

**T**here is a lot of talk about drugs in the world—on the streets, at school, on the Internet and TV. Some of it is true, some not.

Much of what you hear about drugs actually comes from those selling them. Reformed drug dealers have confessed they would have said anything to get others to buy drugs.

Don't be fooled. You need facts to avoid becoming hooked on drugs and to help your friends stay off them. That is why we have prepared this booklet—for you.

Your feedback is important to us, so we look forward to hearing from you. You can visit us on the web at **drugfreeworld.org** and e-mail us at **info@drugfreeworld.org**.

# WHAT ARE INHALANTS?

Inhalants" refers to the vapors from toxic substances which are inhaled to reach a quick high. Of more than 1,000 household and other common products that could be abused as inhalants, most often used are shoe polish, glue, toluene,\* gasoline, lighter fluid, nitrous oxide<sup>†</sup> or "whippets," spray paint, correction fluid, cleaning fluid, amyl nitrite<sup>‡</sup> or "poppers," locker room deodorizers or "rush," and lacquer thinner or other paint solvents.

Most of these produce effects similar to anesthetics, which slow down the body's functions. After an initial high and loss of inhibition comes drowsiness, light-headedness and agitation.

The chemicals are rapidly absorbed through the lungs into the bloodstream and quickly reach the brain and other organs,

\* toluene: a colorless liquid used as a solvent and a fuel.  
† nitrous oxide: a colorless, sweet-smelling gas used as an anesthetic.

sometimes causing irreversible physical and mental damage.

Users inhale the chemical vapors directly from open containers ("sniffing") or breathe the fumes from rags soaked in chemicals ("huffing"). Some spray the substance directly into the nose or mouth, or pour it onto their collar, sleeves or cuffs and sniff them periodically. In "bagging," the user may inhale fumes from substances inside a paper or plastic bag. Bagging in a closed area greatly increases the chances of suffocation.

"Poppers" and "whippets," sold at concerts and dance clubs, are composed of poisonous chemicals that can permanently damage the body and brain.

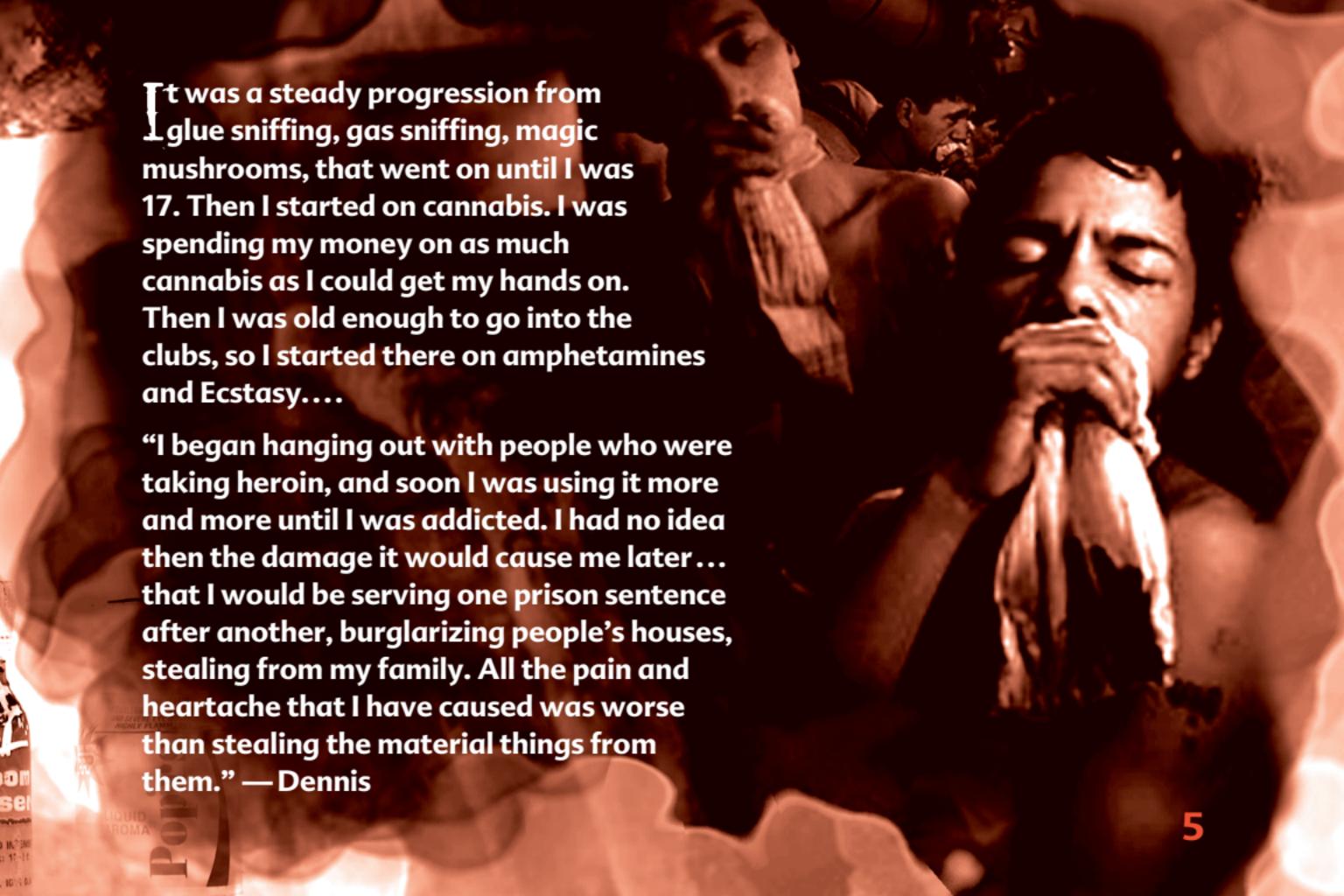
‡ amyl nitrite: a pale yellow liquid used to open or widen blood vessels, sometimes abused as an inhalant.



# STREET NAMES FOR INHALANTS

- |                       |                    |                  |                         |
|-----------------------|--------------------|------------------|-------------------------|
| ✗ Air blast           | ✗ Aroma of men     | ✗ Moon gas       | ✗ Whippets              |
| ✗ Highball            | ✗ Laughing gas     | ✗ Thrust         | ✗ Hardware              |
| ✗ Satan's secret      | ✗ Snotballs        | ✗ Bullet bolt    | ✗ Poppers               |
| ✗ Ames                | ✗ Bolt             | ✗ Oz             | ✗ Whiteout              |
| ✗ Hippie crack        | ✗ Locker room      | ✗ Toilet water   | ✗ Heart-on              |
| ✗ Shoot the<br>breeze | ✗ Spray            | ✗ Buzz bomb      | ✗ Quicksilver           |
| ✗ Amys                | ✗ Boppers          | ✗ Pearls         | ✗ Hiagra in a<br>bottle |
| ✗ Huff                | ✗ Medusa           | ✗ Toncho         | ✗ Rush snappers         |
| ✗ Snappers            | ✗ Texas shoe shine | ✗ Discorama      |                         |
|                       | ✗ Bullet           | ✗ Poor man's pot |                         |





**I**t was a steady progression from glue sniffing, gas sniffing, magic mushrooms, that went on until I was 17. Then I started on cannabis. I was spending my money on as much cannabis as I could get my hands on. Then I was old enough to go into the clubs, so I started there on amphetamines and Ecstasy....

**"I began hanging out with people who were taking heroin, and soon I was using it more and more until I was addicted. I had no idea then the damage it would cause me later... that I would be serving one prison sentence after another, burglarizing people's houses, stealing from my family. All the pain and heartache that I have caused was worse than stealing the material things from them."** — Dennis

When I was in fourth grade a so-called friend of mine introduced me to inhalants. Being so young and not knowing any better, I started huffing gas every day all the way up to my eighth grade year. My motor function skills are pretty much shot and I sit for hours on end just staring into space without a single thought even crossing my mind. It's like my body is here but

I am not. I have a hard time holding down jobs and I have been living by myself now for twelve years.

I look normal from the outside but when I try to show interest and talk to women, it becomes apparent that I am pretty much a vegetable. I am sick of living this way and I would rather be dead than to live my life like this anymore, because it seems like I'm already dead anyway."

—John

# HOW DO INHALANTS AFFECT YOUR BODY?

Inhalant use can cause damage to the heart, kidneys, brain, liver, bone marrow and other organs.

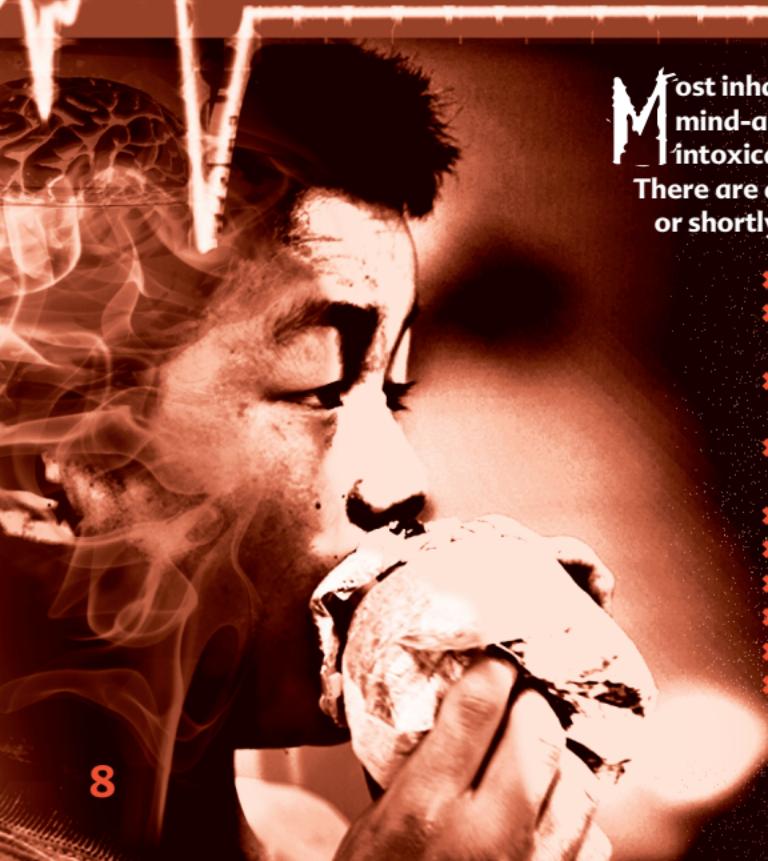
- ✗ Inhalants starve the body of oxygen and force the heart to beat irregularly and more rapidly.
- ✗ Users can experience nausea and nosebleeds and lose their sense of hearing or smell. Chronic use can lead to muscle

wasting and reduced muscle tone, and the poisonous chemicals gradually damage the lungs and the immune system.

- ✗ An inhalant user risks Sudden Sniffing Death Syndrome. Death can occur the first time or the 100th time an inhalant is used.



# SHORT-TERM EFFECTS



Most inhalants act directly on the nervous system to produce mind-altering effects. Within seconds, the user experiences intoxication and other effects similar to those from alcohol. There are a variety of effects that may be experienced during or shortly after use, including:

- ✖ Slurred speech
- ✖ Drunk, dizzy or dazed appearance
- ✖ Inability to coordinate movement
- ✖ Hallucinations and delusions
- ✖ Hostility
- ✖ Apathy
- ✖ Impaired judgment
- ✖ Unconsciousness
- ✖ Severe headaches
- ✖ Rashes around the nose and mouth
- ✖ Prolonged sniffing of these chemicals can induce irregular and rapid heart beat and lead to heart failure and death within minutes.
- ✖ Death from suffocation can occur by replacing oxygen in the lungs with the chemical, and then in the central nervous system, so that breathing ceases.

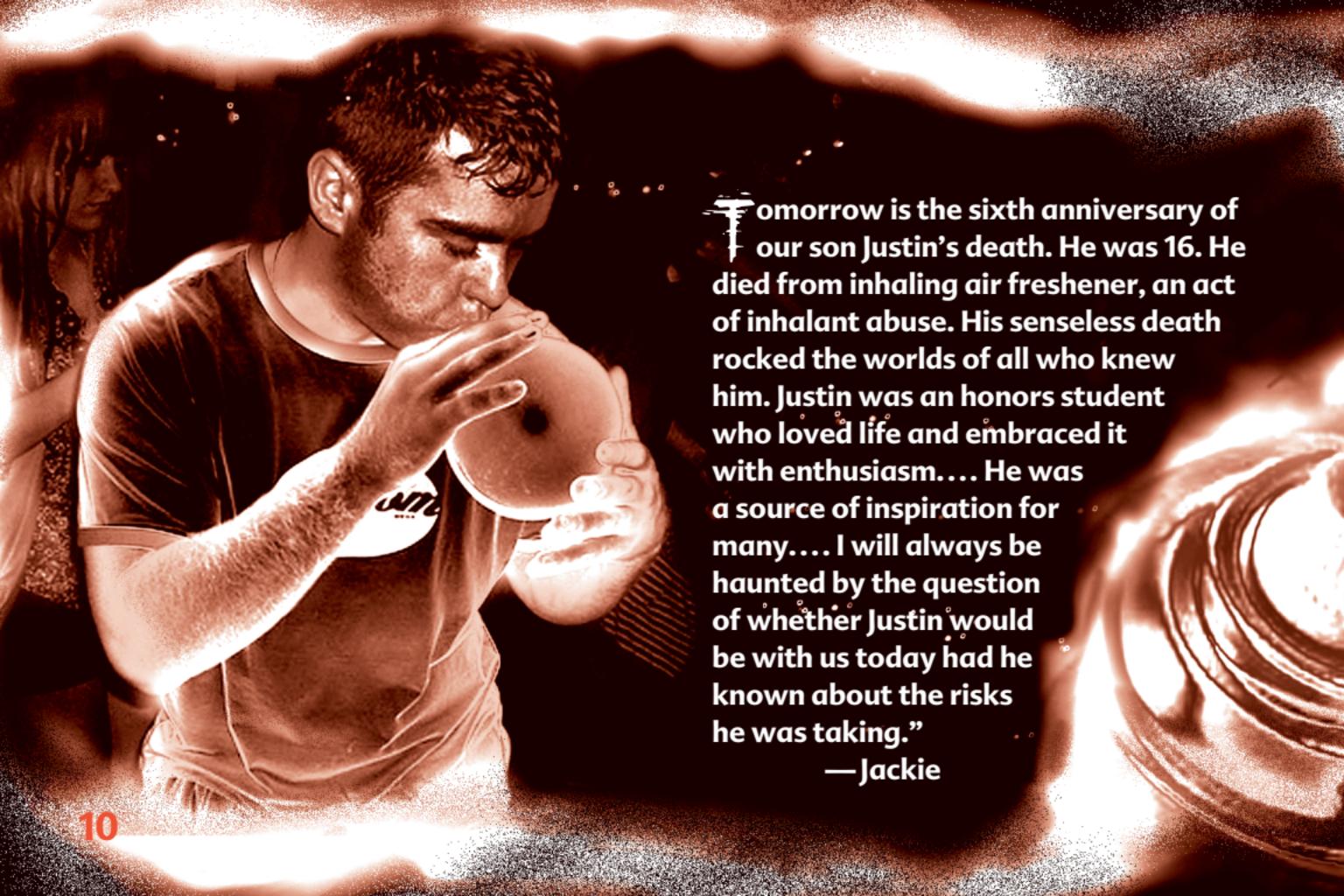
# LONG-TERM EFFECTS

Long-term users have experienced:

- ✗ Muscle weakness
- ✗ Disorientation
- ✗ Lack of coordination
- ✗ Irritability
- ✗ Depression
- ✗ Serious and sometimes irreversible damage to the heart, liver, kidneys, lungs and brain
- ✗ Memory impairment, diminished intelligence
- ✗ Hearing loss
- ✗ Bone marrow damage
- ✗ Deaths from heart failure or asphyxiation (loss of oxygen)

Chronic exposure to inhalants can produce significant, sometimes irreversible, damage to the heart, lungs, liver and kidneys.

The chronic use of inhalants has been associated with a number of serious health problems. Sniffing glue and paint thinner causes kidney problems. Sniffing toluene and other solvents causes liver damage. Inhalant abuse has also resulted in memory impairment and diminished intelligence.

A sepia-toned photograph of a young man with dark hair, wearing a dark t-shirt. He is holding a spray paint can in his right hand, looking down at it intently. The background is dark and out of focus.

**T**omorrow is the sixth anniversary of our son Justin's death. He was 16. He died from inhaling air freshener, an act of inhalant abuse. His senseless death rocked the worlds of all who knew him. Justin was an honors student who loved life and embraced it with enthusiasm.... He was a source of inspiration for many.... I will always be haunted by the question of whether Justin would be with us today had he known about the risks he was taking."

— Jackie



# ARE INHALANTS ADDICTIVE?

Inhalants can be physically and psychologically addictive. Users report a strong urge to continue using inhalants, especially after continued usage over many days.

Habitual users coming off inhalants suffer withdrawal symptoms which can include nausea, excessive sweating, muscle cramps, headaches, chills, agitation, with shaking and hallucinations. In severe cases, withdrawal can cause convulsions.



# INTERNATIONAL STATISTICS

A US survey, combining data from 2002 to 2006, found that an annual average of 593,000 teens aged 12 to 17 had used inhalants for the first time in the year before they took the survey.

- ✖ More than 22.9 million Americans have experimented with inhalants at some point in their lives.
  - ✖ One state in the US averaged more than 3,800 emergency room visits and 450 hospitalizations a year due to inhalant poisonings, according to statistics released in 2008.
  - ✖ By the time students in the US reach the 8th grade, one in five will have used inhalants. In 2007, inhalants were the substance most frequently abused by youth aged 12 or 13.
  - ✖ 22% of inhalant abusers who died of Sudden Sniffing Death Syndrome had no history of previous inhalant abuse—they were first-time users.

- ✖ According to the European School Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs, 20% of youth in the 12 to 16 age group have tried inhalants.
- ✖ In Nairobi, Kenya, an estimated 60,000 children live on the streets and almost all are addicted to some sort of inhalant.
- ✖ In the Pakistani city of Karachi there are an estimated 14,000 street kids, of whom 80% to 90% sniff glue or solvents.
- ✖ In the US, the 2006 National Survey on Drug Use and Health found that 1.1 million youths aged 12 to 17 had used inhalants in the past year.

**22% of inhalant abusers who died had no history of previous inhalant abuse.**

**In Karachi, Pakistan, 80% to 90% of street kids sniff glue or solvents.**

**80 - 90%**

**22%**

A black and white photograph of a man with dark hair and a mustache, wearing a light-colored button-down shirt. He is sitting at a desk, looking directly at the camera with a distressed expression. His hands are raised to his head, and he appears to be surrounded by a large amount of white substance, likely glue, which is covering the desk and parts of the room. In the background, there are shelves with various items, including a box labeled "DIAMOND".

**F**or three days, a friend gave me glue free of cost. On the fourth day he asked for money from me. By then, I was addicted and I had to give him money to get a tube of glue. I needed several tubes of glue daily.” — Marty

# DIFFERENT TYPES OF INHALANTS

Inhalants can be categorized into four different types:

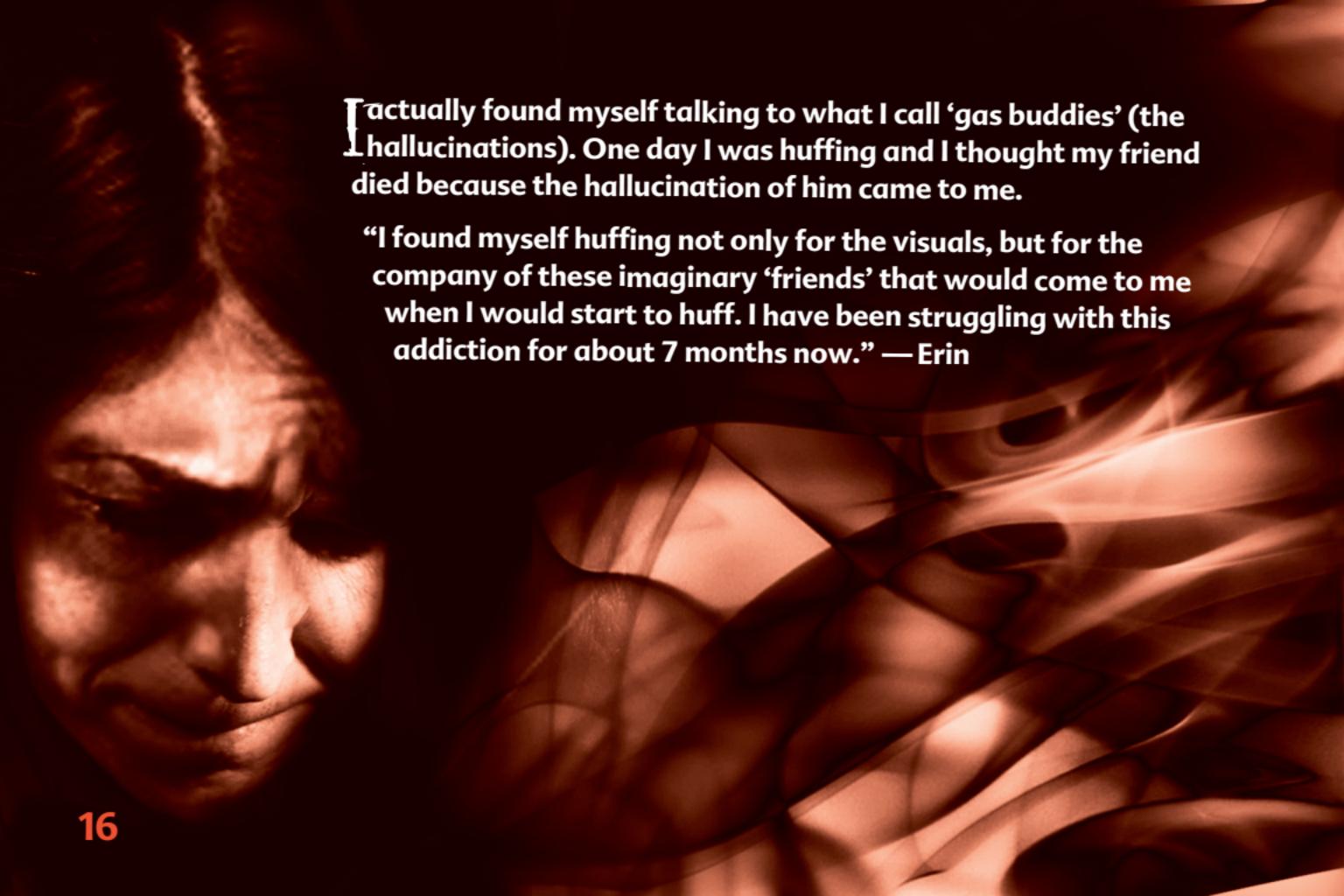
**LIQUIDS** that vaporize at room temperatures. These are found in numerous easily available household and industrial products including paint thinners, degreasers, gasoline, glues, correction fluids and felt-tip marker fluids.

**SPRAYS** such as spray paints, deodorant and hair sprays, vegetable oil sprays for cooking and fabric protector sprays.

**GASES** including medical anesthetics (ether, chloroform and nitrous oxide, commonly called “laughing gas”), butane lighters, propane tanks, whipped cream dispensers and refrigerants.

**NITRITES** (a chemical compound found in food preservatives, leather cleaner, room deodorizers, etc.) are considered a special class of inhalants which act directly on the central nervous system, brain and spinal cord. They are used mainly as sexual enhancers and are commonly known as “poppers” or “snappers.”





I actually found myself talking to what I call 'gas buddies' (the hallucinations). One day I was huffing and I thought my friend died because the hallucination of him came to me.

"I found myself huffing not only for the visuals, but for the company of these imaginary 'friends' that would come to me when I would start to huff. I have been struggling with this addiction for about 7 months now." — Erin

# ARE INHALANTS LEGAL?

**A**lthough inhalants are not regulated under the Controlled Substances Act, 38 states in the US have placed restrictions on the sale and distribution to minors of certain products that are commonly abused as inhalants. Some states have introduced fines, incarceration or mandatory treatment for the sale, distribution, use and/or possession of inhalant chemicals.

Laws also exist in some US states prohibiting the recreational inhalation of nitrous oxide.

Some communities in Western Australia and South Australia have passed local laws making petrol sniffing an offense. In Victoria and Western Australia, police are allowed to search a person who is reasonably believed to be in possession of an inhalant and confiscate it.

In England and Wales, it is illegal for retailers to sell volatile substances to anyone under the age of 18 if there is reason to believe they will use it for inhalation and intoxication purposes.



# INHALEANTS:

The inhaling of fumes from chemicals such as incense, oils, resins, spices and perfumes to alter consciousness, or as part of religious ceremonies, dates back to ancient times in Egypt, Babylonia (present-day Iraq), India and China.

According to some researchers, inhaling gas vapors to alter one's state of consciousness was practiced by priestesses at the Oracle of Delphi\* in ancient Greece.

In the early 1800s, nitrous oxide, ether and chloroform were the anesthetics used commonly as intoxicants.

Nitrous oxide was regarded as a cheap substitute for alcohol and was popularized by the British scientist Sir Humphry Davy. He held nitrous oxide parties and coined the word "laughing gas" in 1799. Noting the anesthetic effects, Davy proposed that the gas could be used for operations, although this was not tried for another half century.

The use of anesthetics for recreational purposes continued throughout the 19th century in Europe and the US.

\* The Greeks believed that the god Apollo spoke to priestesses through the Oracle of Delphi, an ancient shrine.

# A SHORT HISTORY



**Sir  
Humphry Davy**

Ether was used as a recreational drug during the 1920s Prohibition era, when alcohol was made illegal in the US.

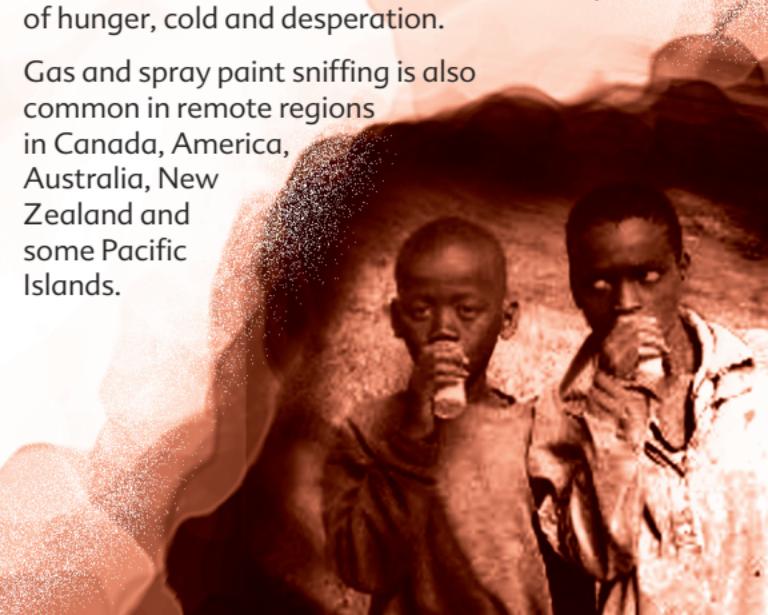
In the 1940s, recreational use of solvents, primarily gasoline, became popular.

Abuse of inhalants in the United States increased in the 1950s and is now widespread among adolescents.

By the 1960s, the practice of solvent sniffing had spread across a wide variety of commercial products including paint and lacquer thinners, nail polish remover, shoe polish, lighter fluid, spray paint and others.

In more recent years, glue and gas sniffing has become a widespread problem among homeless street children in South Asia, Mexico, Eastern Europe, Kenya and other areas around the world. Street kids use these inhalants to numb the pain of hunger, cold and desperation.

Gas and spray paint sniffing is also common in remote regions in Canada, America, Australia, New Zealand and some Pacific Islands.



# The Truth About Drugs

Drugs are essentially poisons. The amount taken determines the effect.

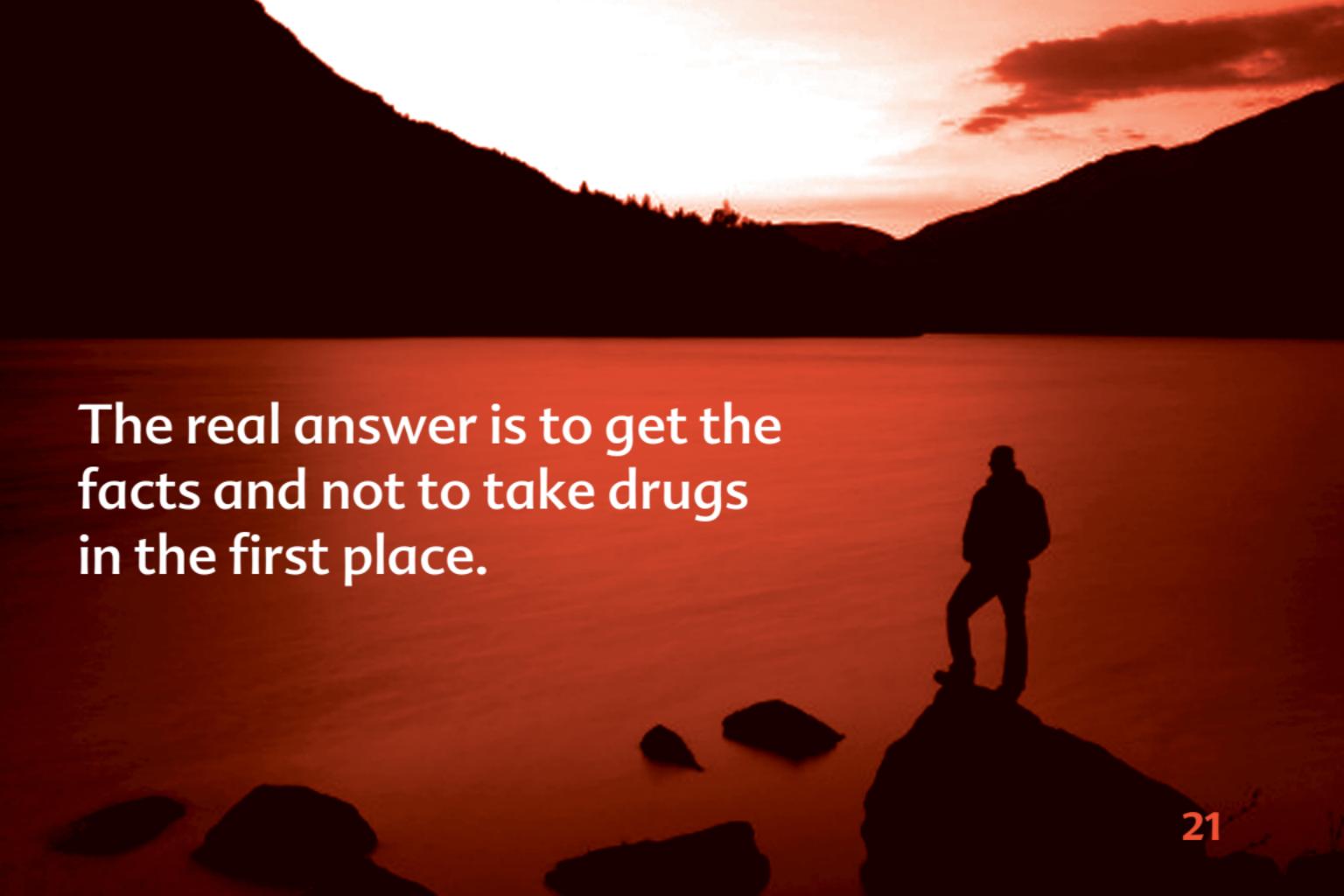
A small amount acts as a stimulant (speeds you up). A greater amount acts as a sedative (slows you down). An even larger amount poisons and can kill.

This is true of any drug. Only the amount needed to achieve the effect differs.

But many drugs have another liability: they directly affect the mind. They can distort the user's perception of what is happening around him or her. As a result, the person's actions may be odd, irrational, inappropriate and even destructive.

Drugs block off all sensations, the desirable ones with the unwanted. So, while providing short-term help in the relief of pain, they also wipe out ability and alertness and muddy one's thinking.

Medicines are drugs that are intended to speed up or slow down or change something about the way your body is working, to try to make it work better. Sometimes they are necessary. But they are still drugs: they act as stimulants or sedatives, and too much can kill you. So if you do not use medicines as they are supposed to be used, they can be as dangerous as illegal drugs.

A silhouette of a person standing on a rocky shore at sunset, looking out over a body of water towards distant mountains.

The real answer is to get the facts and not to take drugs in the first place.

## WHY DO PEOPLE TAKE DRUGS?

People take drugs because they want to change something in their lives.

Here are some of the reasons young people have given for taking drugs:

- To fit in
- To escape or relax
- To relieve boredom
- To seem grown up
- To rebel
- To experiment

They think drugs are a solution. But eventually, the drugs become the problem.

Difficult as it may be to face one's problems, the consequences of drug use are always worse than the problem one is trying to solve with them. The real answer is to get the facts and not to take drugs in the first place.



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Millions of copies of booklets such as this have been distributed to people around the world in 22 languages. As new drugs appear on the streets and more information about their effects become known, existing booklets are updated and new ones created.

The booklets are published by the Foundation for a Drug-Free World, a nonprofit public benefit organization headquartered in Los Angeles, California.

The Foundation provides educational materials, advice and coordination for its international drug prevention network. It works with youth, parents, educators, volunteer organizations and government agencies—anyone with an interest in helping people lead lives free from drug abuse.

# **FACTS YOU NEED TO KNOW**

This booklet is one in a series of publications that cover the facts about marijuana, alcohol, Ecstasy, cocaine, crack cocaine, crystal meth and methamphetamine, inhalants, heroin, LSD and prescription drug abuse. Armed with this information, the reader can make the decision to live a drug-free life.



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