

AMYL NITRITE/POPPERS: THE FACTS

WHAT IS AMYL NITRITE?

Amyl nitrite is also known as 'poppers'. Butyl and isobutyl nitrites have been sold under many names including rush, climax, ram, thrust and heart-on and jungle juice aroma.

Amyl nitrite is classified as an inhalant and is a vasodilator which means it dilates blood vessels. It is one of the alkyl nitrite class of drugs. Others include butyl nitrite, isobutyl nitrite and the nitrates such as nitro-glycerine.

Amyl nitrite has been used for some medical procedures in the past but has a limited role now. It is also used to treat cyanide poisoning.

Historically, amyl nitrite has been used to enhance sexual experience. Amyl nitrite is used at clubs and dance parties. The effects are felt within 30 seconds of inhalation and last for two to three minutes.

WHAT DOES AMYL NITRITE LOOK LIKE?

It is a clear, yellow, highly volatile and flammable liquid. The liquid smells sweet and fruity when fresh but like 'sweaty socks' when stale.

Nitrites are usually sold as a liquid, contained in small bottles. Recreational users inhale the fumes from the bottle in 'snorts'.

EFFECTS OF AMYL NITRITE

Physical effects may include:

- warm sensations
- light-headedness and dizziness
- increased libido
- temporary erectile dysfunction
- unpleasant breath
- skin sensitivity
- redness or itching around mouth and nose
- headache
- sinusitis
- runny nose
- wheezing and breathing difficulty
- nose bleeds
- impaired/decreased coordination and muscle control
- bloodshot or glazed eyes
- blurred vision

- irregular or rapid heart beat or arrhythmia
- chest pain
- low blood pressure
- nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea
- loss of consciousness.

Psychological effects may include:

- euphoria
- increased sensual awareness
- visual distortions
- lowered inhibitions / increased confidence (which can lead to risky behaviour)
- agitation, uneasiness and aggression
- confusion and disorientation
- impaired judgement
- impaired capacity as a parent/ primary carer of children.

LONG TERM EFFECTS

While the level of harm generally experienced from the inhalation of nitrites is low, use can result in a range of clinical conditions varying from mild allergic reactions to life threatening methaeglobinaemia, which is a blood disorder which can lead to inadequate oxygen supply to body tissue. Other possible concerns from prolonged use include impact on cognition (problem solving) and memory.

Use of nitrites should be avoided by people who are anaemic, pregnant women and those with blood pressure problems or a history of cerebral haemorrhaging.

Long term effects include:

- skin lesions
- skin problems particularly around the nose, mouth, lips and face
- damage to eyes and vision which may be persistent
- increased intraocular pressure which is risky for people with underlying glaucoma.

MIXING WITH OTHER DRUGS

Taking Viagra or other drugs used to treat erection problems with amyl nitrite and/or other nitrites can cause a serious decrease in blood pressure, leading to fainting, stroke, or even heart attack.

OVERDOSE

While the possibility of death or serious injury from inhaling nitrites is fairly remote, if they are swallowed rather than inhaled they can cause major medical problems by interfering with the ability of the blood to transport oxygen. Swallowing nitrites can lead to death. Inhaling the fluid rather than the vapours generally from trying to sniff while in a horizontal position can also lead to significant medical problems.

PREGNANCY AND BREASTFEEDING

If a mother uses amyl nitrite while breastfeeding, it is possible that the drug will be present in her milk and have adverse effects on the baby.

It is generally risky to take any drug while breastfeeding without medical advice.

Amyl nitrites can possibly harm the unborn baby when taken by a pregnant woman because it significantly reduces blood flow across the maternal side of the cord. Inform antenatal staff of amyl nitrite use and attend regular antenatal checkups.

AMYL NITRITE RELATED EMERGENCY

If you can't wake someone up or you are concerned that they may have sustained a head injury from a drug related fall – call an ambulance immediately – dial **Triple Zero (000)**.

If the person has been mixing amyl nitrite with other drugs or nitrites, tell the NSW Ambulance paramedic exactly what they have taken. Paramedics are there to help. Generally paramedics don't involve the police **unless** there is danger to themselves or other people/children, someone dies, or a crime (such as violence or theft) has been committed.

THE LAW

In Australia it is illegal to sell, supply or inhale products containing any of the five following nitrites: amyl, iso-amyl, alkyl, butyl and octyl – unless it is under specifically approved circumstances such as a prescription from a medical practitioner, pharmacist supply or distribution by a licence holder.

DRIVING UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF AMYL NITRITE

It is illegal to drive under the influence of drugs, including amyl nitrite. If you break this law you could lose your licence for a set time, and/or be fined.

Anyone under the influence of amyl nitrite who kills or injures another person while driving can be sentenced to a term in prison.

SELF-HELP ASSOCIATIONS

na.org.au for **Narcotics Anonymous Australia**, a non profit organisation that helps people abstain from drugs.

INFORMATION AND ADVICE

For free and confidential advice about alcohol and other drugs 24 hours, 7 days a week, call the **National Alcohol and Other Drug hotline: 1800 250 015**.

It will automatically direct you to the Alcohol and Drug Information Service in the state or territory you are calling from.

Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council provides links to Aboriginal community controlled health services across NSW. Visit www.ahmrc.org.au for information about AHMRC members including a regional map, information and links to members websites.

Drug and Alcohol Multicultural Education Centre (DAMEC) provides services for people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Contact DAMEC on **(02) 8113 1301** or for counselling and support services for CALD communities call **(02) 8706 0150**.

Drug Info provides facts and resources on alcohol and other drugs and the prevention of related harm. Visit www.druginfo.adf.org.au

State Library of New South Wales Drug Info provides up to date information on alcohol and other drugs in public libraries throughout NSW. Visit www.druginfo.sl.nsw.gov.au

eheadspace provides mental health and wellbeing support, information and services for young people (12-25 years) and their family and friends. Visit www.eheadspace.org.au

Family Drug Support provides 24-7 telephone support to families in crisis due to drug and alcohol issues. Call the Helpline on **1300 368 186** or visit www.fds.org.au

Kids Helpline is a free, 24 hour counselling service for young people aged 5 to 25 years. Counselling is offered via the Kids Helpline website www.kidshelp.com.au or email, or call **1800 55 1800**.

Nepean Youth Drug and Alcohol Service (NYDAS) works within a holistic model of care to address a range of issues for young people (12 –20 years of age) related to their alcohol and other drug use. Call **(02) 4734 2129** or **(02) 4734 1333**.

NSW Users and AIDS Association (NUAA) is a peak drug user organisation in NSW providing harm reduction information and blood borne virus prevention peer education. Visit www.nuaa.org.au

Poisons Information Centre is a 24/7 call centre service available across Australia. Call **13 11 26**

ReachOut is an Australian online youth mental health service with a mobile-friendly site and forums where you can access help, information and support. Visit au.reachout.com

Sexual Health Info Link provides free and confidential sexual health support and information. Visit www.shil.nsw.gov.au

TAFE NSW provides help with education, career development or personal matters. Students can contact a local TAFE/ university counsellor. Visit www.tafensw.edu.au

Youth Action is the peak organisation for young people in NSW. Visit www.youthaction.org.au and use the search option to access a directory of NSW youth services.

Youth Solutions provides services for young people 12 to 25 years of age and the community including prevention and health promotion, drug and alcohol education, community programs and information and referral. Visit www.youthsolutions.com.au or call **(02) 4628 2319** [provides services to young people in Macarthur & Wingecarribee].

NSW Health aims to reduce drug-related harm for individuals and the community by providing the facts, including the possible health, social and economic consequences of using alcohol and other drugs.

