

Nitrous oxide

How does it make you feel?

Nitrous oxide slows down your brain and your body's responses, and the effects of the drug varies depending on how much has been inhaled.

Taking nitrous oxide can cause:

- feelings of euphoria, relaxation and calmness
- fits of giggles and laughter – hence the nickname 'laughing gas'
- sound distortions and hallucinations – when you see or hear things that aren't there

Nitrous oxide can also:

- give you a severe headache
- cause dizziness
- stop you thinking straight
- cause short-lived but intense feelings of paranoia

Physical health risks

- It is very dangerous to inhale nitrous oxide directly from the canister, and doing it in an enclosed space is also very dangerous.
- If you take too much nitrous oxide you risk falling unconscious and/or suffocating from the lack of oxygen. People have died this way.
- Dizziness, which might make you act carelessly or dangerously.
- Heavy regular use of nitrous oxide can lead to a deficiency of vitamin B12 and to a form of anaemia. Severe B12 deficiency can lead to serious nerve damage. It can even lead to paralysis, and the damage may be lasting.
- Regular use can stop you forming white blood cells properly.
- It can be hard to judge the amount to use safely. If you have too much you can end up fainting, having an accident or worse.

Can you get addicted?

It may be possible to become psychologically dependent on nitrous oxide, meaning that users develop an increased desire to keep using it despite the harm it may cause, but the evidence on this is limited.

In anecdotal reports, some people have reported developing cravings or feelings that they want to continue using nitrous oxide.

- Some volatile substances are covered by the 2016 Psychoactive Substances Act, which means it's illegal to give away or sell.
- There's no penalty for possession, unless you're in prison.
- Supply and production can get you up to 7 years in prison, an unlimited fine or both.

Like drink-driving, driving when high is dangerous and illegal. If you're caught driving under the influence, you may receive a heavy fine, driving ban, or prison sentence.

If the police catch people supplying illegal drugs in a home, club, bar or hostel, they can potentially prosecute the landlord, club owner or any other person concerned in the management of the premises.