



NITROUS OXIDE

Information Sheet

What is Nitrous Oxide?

Nitrous Oxide is a Class C Drug also known as Balloons, Laughing Gas, Whippits, Chargers and Hippie Crack.

It is a colourless gas, usually sold in small metal canisters or in larger formats and inhaled via a balloon.

Legally, Nitrous Oxide is a gas that is used, in combination with oxygen, by doctors and dentists to relax and sedate patients during treatment, but is also used in whipped cream dispensers, and car engines.

Used recreationally, it can induce euphoria, dissociation, hallucinogenic states of mind, and relaxation when inhaled.

How do people use it?

The gas from larger canisters is usually transferred into a balloon, then inhaled.

NOS should never be inhaled straight from a canister – as the gas is ice cold and under pressure, which can burn the throat and damage lungs.

Using big canisters makes it harder for someone to control how much they are consuming.

Short-term effects can include:

- Feeling relaxed, calm or happy,
- Giggles and laughter (“laughing gas”)
- Distorted sounds and mild hallucinations
- Increased vulnerability to others

Use, especially of larger doses, can also cause:

- Headaches and dizziness
- Confusion and poor judgement
- Panic or paranoia.

Regular heavy use can lead to:

Deficiency of vitamin B12 and to a form of anaemia.

Nerve Damage - In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the number of young people suffering nerve damage as a result of recreational use of nitrous oxide.

In some cases, the effects can be severe and long-lasting. Effects can include numbness, problems with muscles and walking, and urinary continence problems.

Other health risks can include:

Falling unconscious and/or suffocating from lack of oxygen.

Dizziness, which might make users act carelessly or dangerously

Regular use can stop someone forming white blood cells properly.



The Law

In 2023 The Government updated the law to make possession of Nitrous Oxide illegal “if it is, or is likely to be, wrongfully inhaled” by classifying it as a Class C drug. This means that it is illegal to have, give away or sell.

Possession can lead to a community sentence, up to 2 years in prison plus an unlimited fine.

Supplying (even to friends) could up to 14 years in prison unlimited fine.

If someone is caught driving under the influence, they may receive a heavy fine, driving ban, or prison sentence. People have been injured and killed in road accidents caused by inhaling balloons whilst driving.

Police can also take action against clubs, bars, or landlords if NOS is supplied on their premises.

Staying Safe – Reducing the Risks

Go low and slow. It can be easy to take too much and experience negative effects. Pacing use and allowing lungs to recover and keeping careful track of how much and how often they have inhaled can reduce risks

Don't mix with other drugs and alcohol. If someone mixes substance use, the effects are more unpredictable and difficult to control.

Looking out for each other. Not using it alone and making sure someone else is around, in case something does go wrong, who can get help.

Get help if something goes wrong. Call 999 for the emergency services and be honest about what has happened. No one will get into trouble for helping to save someone in an emergency, it is not illegal to have an illicit substance in the bloodstream it is possession and supply that is illegal.

Do not share balloons. This can spread infections.

Never inhale straight from the canister or dispenser. Always release the gas into a balloon.

Sit down if using NOS. This can help prevent falling over and injury. Always avoid using it near railway tracks, busy roads, or water.

Avoid heavy and regular use. This will decrease the likelihood of vitamin B12 deficiency.

Keep canisters away from fires, candles, lighters and cigarettes. This will help to avoid the risk of canisters exploding.

Care for the environment and the local community. Dispose of waste safely or take it home

Where to go for help and support

NHS 111 offers support on all issues including drugs and alcohol.

Know the Score – live chat function where you can ask questions or ask for help knowthescore.info/help-support

Frank talktofrank.com

The Mix themix.org.uk/

Life Stuff life-stuff.org

