



POPPERS

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What are Poppers?

'Poppers' is slang for a group of chemicals called alkyl nitrites. Discovered in 1844 (as amyl nitrite) they were used to treat angina and are still used for other medical purposes. They are also used as recreational drugs, emerging in the disco culture of the 1970s.

Other types include isopropyl nitrite (most common), isobutyl nitrite and butyl nitrite.

Illegal to sell in the UK 'for human consumption' (Medicines Act 1968), poppers are often sold as a liquid in small brightly-coloured bottles, called 'odourisers'. This liquid evaporates at room temperature, creating a vapour which can be inhaled.

What are the effects?

When inhaled, poppers enter the blood stream quickly, and effects will kick in quickly too. These can be strong but usually last no more than 2-5 minutes.

Effects can include head rush, dizziness, euphoria, feelings of warmth, skin flushes, nausea, increased heartrate and headache. Reports also include sexual arousal, increased risk-taking, and difficulty maintaining erection.

Poppers cause the relaxation of smooth muscle tissue like the throat, stomach lining, vagina or anus. It is sometimes used to aid anal sex, increasing blood flow and relaxing sphincter muscles.

What are the risks?

- Smooth muscle relaxation can result in widening of blood vessels. This can increase heart rate and lower blood pressure, with risks to people with heart conditions or abnormal blood pressure.
- Poppers are highly flammable and also burn skin on contact.
- Alkyl nitrites are toxic if swallowed and can even be fatal. Inhaling larger amounts can affect haemoglobin and risk oxygen starvation.
- Poppers can impair judgement including around decisions about sex.
- Regular or heavy use can also cause skin irritation particularly around the nose and mouth.
- Since a change in ingredients in 2006 there have been rising reports overuse of poppers can cause sight loss or 'poppers maculopathy'. In most cases this is temporary but dependent on severity of use.

Poppers & Other Drugs

Mixing more than one drug always increases the risk of unwanted or unintended effects - this includes mixing poppers with any other drugs, particularly ones that affect blood pressure.

This includes blood pressure medication and any erection-inducing drugs such as sildenafil (Viagra), which could cause dangerous drops in blood pressure.

As poppers increase heartrate, mixing with stimulants such as cocaine, MDMA, or methamphetamine could cause racing heartrate and extra strain on your heart.

Harm Reduction

- Inhalation is the least risky way to use poppers: always recap the bottle after use.
- Take breaks in between inhalations.
- **Avoid drinking alkyl nitrites: this can lead to organ failure, blindness, brain damage or death. If someone swallows poppers, call 999 immediately.**
- Poppers are extremely flammable and should be kept away from any flames including cigarettes: it is not advisable to dip cigarette ends to inhale, even if unlit, and you should never heat up a bottle of poppers.
- Start with a low dose, and take breaks between use. If you begin to have any trouble with vision stop using poppers immediately.

Poppers can cause irritation and burns to skin on contact: if this happens rinse it off as soon as possible with clean water. If you have any redness or swelling please speak to your GP or pharmacist.

Avoid putting poppers near eyes! Poppers in the eye can be very painful and risky for eyesight: if this happens immediately flush with plenty of clean water.

If using poppers for sex, always remember consent (including if and when to use poppers). It is a good idea to discuss what kind of sex you want before using, and if you need condoms or extra lube, make sure you are stocked up!



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