

Nitrous Oxide

Nitrous oxide is a colourless, slightly sweet-smelling gas with a short-acting disorienting effect. The gas is most commonly used as an anaesthetic in dentistry and a propellant in the food industry (for example in spray cream). Nitrous oxide can be breathed through a mask, cone, or more commonly, a balloon.

What are the effects of nitrous oxide?

- Giddiness
- A floating sensation
- An absence of physical pain
- An overwhelming desire to laugh
- Some may experience mild auditory or visual hallucinations.

The effects after the initial stimulation include:

- Nausea
- Sleepiness
- Lack of co-ordination and balance
- Loss of appetite
- Headache.

What are the risks of taking nitrous oxide?

- As nitrous oxide affects motor control, you are likely to fall over soon after inhaling it. It's best to sit down before taking it to avoid a serious fall
- The gas should not be inhaled for more than 30 seconds as this can lead to the risk of suffocation
- Inhaling nitrous oxide directly from the canister can cause frostbite of the nose, lips and vocal chords. Because of the anaesthetic effects of the gas, you may not realise there is any injury until the effects of the gas have worn off
- Continued use of nitrous oxide can interfere with the function of vitamin B12, which is essential in maintaining a healthy nervous system.

The law and nitrous oxide:

Is nitrous oxide illegal?

Nitrous oxide is not illegal to possess, but this doesn't mean that it is safe to use. It is illegal, in England and Wales, for anyone to sell or supply nitrous oxide to people under-18, if they think they're likely to be inhaling the nitrous oxide.

Other terms for nitrous oxide:

Laughing gas, happy gas, hippy crack.