

## KNOW YOUR STUFF

# NITROUS OXIDE

AKA: smart whip, laughing gas, NOS, whippits, balloons  
(Drug names vary hugely, these are just a few examples)



## WHAT IS IT?

A colourless gas contained in pressurised metal canisters or cylinders and transferred to a balloon before being inhaled.

## THE HIGHS

Dissolves quickly into the bloodstream and passes to the brain, rapidly causing effects such as euphoria, relaxation, laughter, and distortions in what someone sees and hears. These wear off quickly, with the person feeling back to normal within a few minutes.

## THE LOWS

Immediate effects can include headache, dizziness, fainting (and risk of physical injury), chest tightness (particularly for people with breathing problems such as asthma), loss of judgement (which can lead to reckless behaviour and accidents, including car crashes), hallucinations (which can impact on mental health), and a fast heart rate (which can lead to cardiac arrest).

Trying to prolong the effects, through repeated use or trying to inhale more (for example by consuming it in an enclosed space), increases the risk of passing out, brain damage or death from lack of oxygen.

Regular use can deplete levels of vitamin B12 in the body, which can cause serious nerve damage – this usually starts as tingling in the fingers and toes, but can lead to numbness or pain in the hands and feet, and even paralysis. These may not be reversible. Vitamin B12 deficiency can also cause a form of anaemia, a condition affecting the red blood cells, with symptoms commonly including tiredness, forgetfulness, getting out of breath easily, and low mood.

Mixing nitrous oxide with another drug is dangerous because it increases the risks associated with both substances. Using it while drinking alcohol, for instance, means someone is more likely to have an accident, while taking it alongside a psychedelic such as LSD or magic mushrooms may lead to more vivid – and scary – hallucinations.

Dependence can occur with any substance and nitrous oxide is no exception.

Nitrous oxide is a potent greenhouse gas, 300 times more destructive than carbon dioxide, and discarded containers and balloons are a threat to wildlife and the environment.

Other than some very specific exceptions, nitrous oxide is illegal to possess, give away (including passing a balloon to someone else) or sell, with possible consequences including a fine, community sentence, caution (which would appear in a criminal record) and prison term for repeat, serious offenders.



For more information go to:

**FRANK**

<https://www.talktofrank.com/drug/nitrous-oxide>



**DSM** foundation  
The drug education charity

[www.dsmfoundation.org.uk](http://www.dsmfoundation.org.uk)

— The —  
**Wellbeing  
Hub**  
— from Teen Tips —



[www.teentips.co.uk](http://www.teentips.co.uk)