

Poppers : gay men, sex and drugs / Terrence Higgins Trust.

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Gay men, sex and drugs

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What's the score?

Poppers are also known as: amyl/butyl/isobutyl nitrite, amyl (especially in Australia, where it's pronounced 'ammul'), aromas and by brand names like Liquid Gold, Rush, etc. They're often (but wrongly) called 'nitrates', which is a similar, but different chemical.

Poppers are a liquid made from chemicals from the alkyl nitrite family. The name comes from the days when they came in glass capsules that popped when broken open.

Taking poppers

When dancing or having sex the fumes are breathed in, usually through the nose (or inhaled through the mouth or from a poppers-soaked cloth). They should never be swallowed as this can stop the heart and kill.

Highs and lows

Seconds after breathing them in, poppers cause a rush of blood to your head, your heart beats fast and muscles relax (including the sphincter muscle in your arse hole). For a few minutes you can feel an excited, light-headed feeling. They can be used on the dancefloor too, to boost the effects of music and lights.

Headache is the main side effect. Poppers on the skin causes poppers burns which go in a few days (wash poppers off with water straight away but get medical help if they get in your eyes).

In some people poppers cause dizziness or fainting.

A long term relationship?

Poppers aren't addictive in the way some drugs are but they can be habit-forming and the more you use them the less effect they have. Sensitivity comes back after a few days of not using them.

Poppers with other drugs

Viagra-type drugs – makers of erection drugs like Viagra warn against using them with poppers, as both lower blood pressure. Poppers are *nitrites*. A similar drug (*nitrates*) is used by people with heart problems. Taking Viagra, etc. while on nitrates has killed people by causing a fatal drop in blood pressure. So to be on the safe side, caution is advised with poppers (*nitrites*) too.

HIV drugs – protease inhibitors push up levels of erection drugs in the body, meaning a bigger risk of a dangerous interaction if poppers are used.

Ecstasy, speed, cocaine or crystal meth – these all put strain on the heart. Taking them with poppers stresses it even more.

Useful to know

Because poppers can kill an erection, it's better to put a condom on before the first hit of poppers.

Poppers easily catch fire so should be kept away from naked flames, cigarettes, etc.

You should avoid poppers if you've got high or low blood pressure, a heart condition or glaucoma (an eye condition).

The law

Possessing poppers is not illegal under UK law. The reason poppers are sold as a 'room deodoriser', 'leather cleaner' or 'tape head cleaner' is to get round restrictions against selling them as a product to be breathed in.



Sex on poppers

Poppers can make you feel horny, lower your inhibitions and make orgasms feel stronger. Because they relax the sphincter (the muscle in the arse hole) poppers can make it easier to be fucked or fisted. They can cause a man to lose his hard-on too.

Research shows poppers might play an important role in HIV being passed on. The reasons could be:

- poppers can lower inhibitions, making unsafe sex more likely
- there's a bigger risk of the arse bleeding (poppers expand blood vessels inside the arse)
- and/or poppers might make the immune system weaker for a short time, so that people are more open to infection.

It's thought the biggest risk of HIV being passed on is when an HIV negative man uses poppers when fucked without a condom by a man with HIV.



More info

If you'd like to talk to someone with lots of experience of alcohol and drug-related issues, there's:

One-2-One counselling with a drugs counsellor at **Terrence Higgins Trust's** London offices. It's **free** of charge and to see if this would be useful for you, call our **Wellbeing Service** on **0207 812 1777**.

Or you can ask one of the **LADS** outreach team (identifiable in venues and cruising areas by their LADS stand, t-shirts and ID badges) about speaking to our drugs worker.

Also, check out www.tht.org.uk / **DRUGFUCKED**

Antidote

A London service gay and bisexual men concerned about their alcohol or drug use can make use of, with weekly drop-in, one-to-one counselling, support groups and more. Call **020 7287 8743** or go to www.thehungerford.org/antidote.asp

Talk To Frank

Information and support around alcohol and drug use. Call the 24 hour helpline on **0800 77 66 00** or contact by email, details from their website. Also, check out the 'need help' section of the site, www.talktofrank.com