

Risks of nitrous oxide abuse

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General information

Nitrous oxide is a gas that is used, in combination with oxygen, by doctors and dentists to relax and sedate patients during their treatment.

The sale of nitrous oxide for recreational use is illegal, under the Psychoactive Substances Act 2016. However, it is one of the more common illegal drugs used by young people.

Nitrous oxide is sometimes called 'nos' or 'laughing gas'. For recreational use it is usually sold in small canisters known as 'whippits'.



Risks of recreational use

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.

Treatment of these problems would usually require referral to a consultant neurologist. Usually recovery will be complete, although occasionally permanent disability may occur.

Use of nitrous oxide in medical and dental treatment

Nitrous oxide as part of your medical or dental treatment is very safe indeed. This is not only because dentists and doctors are highly trained in the safe use of nitrous oxide, but also because it is usually used at low concentrations: the majority of the gas being breathed is oxygen, with a smaller amount of nitrous oxide being used.

If you have any questions or concerns about nitrous oxide, please ask the medical or dental team who are providing your treatment.

More information

www.talktofrank.com

www.nhs.uk/live-well/addiction-support/drug-addiction-getting-help

Further information

If you have any questions about this information leaflet, please contact the Salaried Dental Service.

Exeter NHS Dental Access Centre

3rd Floor
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EX1 2ED

Tel: 01392 405718

Email: rduh.sds-exeter@nhs.net

Website: www.healthyteethdevon.nhs.uk

Barnstaple NHS Dental Access Centre

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Barnstaple Health Centre
Vicarage Street, Barnstaple
EX32 7BH

Tel: 01271 370562

Email: rduh.sds-barnstaple@nhs.net

Website: www.healthyteethdevon.nhs.uk

PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) ensures that the NHS listens to patients, relatives, carers and friends, answers questions and resolves concerns as quickly as possible. If you have a query or concern call 01271 314090 or email rduh.pals-northern@nhs.net. You can also visit the PALS and Information Centre in person at North Devon District Hospital, Barnstaple.

Have your say

Royal Devon University Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust aims to provide high quality services. However, please tell us when something could be improved. If you have a comment or compliment about a service or treatment, please raise your comments with a member of staff or the PALS team in the first instance.

Tell us about your experience of our services. Share your feedback on the Care Opinion website www.careopinion.org.uk.

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