

Nitrous Oxide

AKA: N₂O, Laughing Gas, 'Hippy Crack,' NO₂, Balloons, Whippets

Popularity 4.2% of 16-24 yr olds reported use 2022/23, down from 9% in 2016-17 (CSEW 2023)

Form/Method of Use: gas discharged in to balloon from cylinder using a "cracker," cream dispenser or valve on tank. Gas inhaled from balloon; less frequently (and more dangerously) via a mask or directly from cylinder

Dose range: ranges from 1 or 2 balloons per session to 100-200+ whippets a day

Duration: under 5 minutes/balloon

Effects: mild euphoria, hilarity, sense of disassociation, disorientation, reduced sense of pain; enhanced experience of other psychedelics

About: Used recreationally since the 1770s and then used medically. Use in UK became more widespread in the 2000s. Initially regulated under the PSA and, since 2023 a Class C drug. Relatively low risk but concerns linked to Antisocial Behaviour and concern about neural damage with heavy use.



Law: Controlled Drug – class C schedule 5; Possession for inhalation outside of medical settings illegal. Supply for non-medical inhalation or "reckless" supply illegal.

Profile: dissociative anaesthetic; hallucinogen; euphoriant

Cost: 4-8p/g; £1-2 per balloon

Source: on-line; festivals, street vendors, under-counter shop sales

Indicators: balloons, empty whippets or cylinders, sound of gas discharge, disorientated

Risks: accidents when intoxicated especially driving; lung damage if used incorrectly, tolerance, Vitamin B12 deficiency leading to nerve damage & possible paralysis; freeze burns, hypoxia