

FIVE THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT ...

Alcohol inhalation

Bernard Le Foll MD PhD, Genane Loheswaran MSc

1 Alcohol inhalation is becoming increasingly popular

Alcohol inhalation is the practice of inhaling alcohol rather than drinking it. Commercially available devices or other mechanical ways are used to aerosolize or vaporize the alcohol.

There is little evidence to support positive and negative claims

It is advertised that users can feel the effects of alcohol with fewer calories and no hangovers. However, these claims have not been substantiated. Although alcohol inhalation may not raise the blood alcohol level to the intoxication threshold¹ (Keith Shelton, Virginia Commonwealth University: personal communication, 2014), there is a rapid increase in blood alcohol levels. Adverse effects are unknown and require further investigation.



2 Specific devices have been developed for alcohol inhalation

Some devices are nebulizers that transform alcohol into a mist that can be inhaled (e.g., alcohol-without-liquid [AWOL] devices). Others are branded as vaporizers that heat the alcohol solution, allowing users to inhale the vapour. Prices for devices vary from about \$35 to several hundred dollars, with leading designers marketing appealing devices.

3 The addictive potential is unknown

About 10% of women and 20% of men who drink alcohol will experience alcohol dependence.² The faster a drug gets to the brain, the higher its addictive potential.³ Chronic alcohol inhalation through continuous exposure in a vapour chamber was found to be the most effective way to induce alcohol dependence in rodents.⁴

4 Alcohol inhalation devices are inconsistently regulated

Alcohol inhalation devices are prohibited in licensed establishments in many jurisdictions across North America, including Ontario.⁵ However, they are readily available online and in other countries.

References

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Affiliations: Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (Le Foll, Loheswaran), Toronto, Ont.; Department of Pharmacology and Toxicology (Loheswaran), University of Toronto, Toronto, Ont.

Correspondence to: Bernard Le Foll, bernard.lefoll@camh.ca

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