



## Nitrous Oxide

It's not a laughing matter



- Use of N<sub>2</sub>O (Balloons, Whippets, Hippie Crack) as a recreational drug is common. Around 9% of 16-24 year olds use it per year [\[1\]](#)
- **Acutely** it can cause LOC, asphyxia & **seizures**
- **Avoid phenytoin** in seizure management (Toxbase)
- If used directly from cannister can cause barotrauma & cold injury to throat/lungs.
- **Chronic use causes inactivation of B12** but B12 levels may be normal
- Can present with **vague neurological symptoms**, patchy numbness, usually worse in hands & feet, loss of dexterity, problems with balance/gait, leg weakness (with loss of reflexes)
- Can present with VTE or myelosuppression

### What to do

- Give **hydroxocobalamin 1 mg IM** and **folic acid 5 mg oral** to all patients with acute neurological features (See [Toxbase](#) for further advice)
- Prescribe B12
- Think harm reduction e.g. inhale from a balloon (<https://www.talktofrank.com/drug/nitrous-oxide>)
- Refer to GP/Drug services
- Consider safeguarding

[1] [Drug misuse in England and Wales - Appendix table - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\) 2020](#)

For Safety Alerts and RCEM issued Safety Flashes see:

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