

Viagra and poppers dangers ^[1]

Dear Alice,

I know that it is extremely dangerous to mix viagra (or other ED drugs) and poppers (amyl nitrate), and that one should wait for 24 hours after using viagra (to let it get out of your system) before using poppers. My question is what is the waiting period after using poppers before it is safe to use viagra? In other words, how long before the physiological effects of poppers wear off?

Answer

Dear Reader,

You are correct; mixing Viagra and poppers is extremely dangerous for two reasons. First, it's dangerous because they both cause a person's blood pressure to drop. The combination can result in fainting, stroke, heart attack, and/or death. The second reason is an increased risk of contracting a sexually transmitted infection (STI) while using both (more on this later). It's great that you know about the 24-hour waiting period between taking Viagra and taking poppers. While it's not clear the *exact* timeframe in which it is safe to take Viagra after doing poppers (and vice-versa), it is recommended that poppers and Viagra are not used within 24 hours of each other.

Poppers are a recreational drug commonly used in sexual encounters for enhancing sexual sensation, creating a giddy high, relaxing the muscles, and decreasing inhibitions. Poppers can be made of a few different chemical compounds, including amyl nitrate (a chemical often used as a fuel additive), or amyl nitrite (a prescription heart medication), among others. Sold in sex shops often as "VCR head cleaner," "leather cleaner," or deodorizers in small bottles, they are consumed by inhaling or "huffing" the fumes (never by ingesting). The "high" lasts for no more than a minute, after which people will often sniff more, because the effect wears off so quickly.

Viagra carries few risks if you wait for 24 hours before taking poppers. Poppers carry more risk, but are safer if used in moderation and if not combined with Viagra (again, observe the 24-hour rule). However, even on their own, poppers can be quite dangerous. Minor side effects can include slurred speech, sores around the nose and mouth, nosebleeds, red eyes, and a lack of coordination. With prolonged use, more serious affects can include nausea, vomiting, dizziness, headaches, or fatigue. In severe cases, memory loss, damage to ears, kidneys, or the heart, experiencing hallucinations, or falling into a coma, can occur.

If you're going to use poppers, a few safety tips:

- Never ingest them. If you do, contact poison control immediately. Do not allow it to come into contact with your skin (it burns).
- Avoid "forced" huffing if your nose is stuffed. This can cause ear and sinus problems.
- Keep poppers away from cigarettes, candles, lighters, etc. They are highly flammable.
- Use in moderation.
- Avoid entirely if you have a suppressed immune system (poppers reduce immune functioning for several days after use). Also avoid if you are pregnant, have a heart condition, high blood pressure, anemia, or history of cerebral hemorrhaging.
- Poppers may impair judgment, so don't drop your safer sex precautions (condoms, dams, etc.) BEFORE you take poppers.
- And as you noted, never use them with Viagra.

Viagra (sildenafil), a prescription erectile dysfunction medication, is often used recreationally by people who don't have trouble getting erections. It poses no direct harm by itself, but the combination of Viagra with poppers (or any drug that lowers inhibitions) has the potential to increase the risk of contracting an STI. People can sustain more sexual encounters for longer periods on Viagra, so there is the potential to have more sexual partners. Add in the decreased inhibitions, and there is a much greater likelihood for risky sexual behavior. Poppers also decrease pain sensation and dilate blood vessels. Therefore, those who participate in anal sex may consume poppers in order to have more anal sex for longer periods of time. This has the potential to result in more bleeding, plus a higher risk for contracting STIs.

If you are concerned about mixing Viagra and poppers, you may want to speak with your health care provider about your personal risk.

For more information on drugs often used during sex (and their various risks), check out the related Q&As.

Alice!

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