



Kelsey Niziolek

Wellness

## How Galaxy Gas Became the Defining High of the Brainrot Era

There's nothing new about recreational nitrous oxide—you may know it as “whippets.” But a garish brand and a bunch of extremely viral videos have turned an old-fashioned drug into a terrifying new meme.

By Kieran Press-Reynolds



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The internet is rife with clips of people huffing on long white tubes and then collapsing on the ground. They're in [classrooms](#), in [warehouses](#), [falling down staircases](#). This isn't the "dizzy challenge" or a new variant on last year's [Grimace Shake shitposts](#). It's Galaxy Gas—an uncanny twist on an old-school high.

Galaxy Gas is nitrous oxide, also known as laughing gas, nos, nangs, whippets (not the dog breed). It's a drug that's been used for ages by doctors and dentists as an anesthetic, and recreationally by teens looking for a quick jolt of euphoria. It's also used in kitchens to quickly create foams and whipped creams, which Galaxy Gas claims is their business model. The brand, which has currently paused sales, has gone wildly viral because it was widely available in smoke shops and mainstream retailers and comes in kiddie-friendly flavors like Mango Smoothie, Strawberry Cream, and Vanilla Cupcake. When I was in high school in the mid-2010s, people sucked gas out of balloons filled from large metal tanks of nitrous. That image of a cheap, grimy gastank high was off-putting. Now the experience is as innocent as downing squirts of sweet whipped cream from a colorful can. It's basically the JUUL of nitrous oxide: drugs with an Instagram-cute sheen.

Whippets have gone in and out of vogue cyclically for decades. [The drug works](#) by inhibiting NMDA receptors, which provides an anesthetic effect. They also release endogenous opioids that hit like morphine, and activate GABAA receptors that can reduce anxiety. The possession of nitrous oxide is basically legal and tolerated in the US. Some states have taken steps to curb misuse: Arizona and California prohibit anyone under 18 from buying nitrous oxide; Louisiana became the first

state to outright **ban the retail sale** of nitrous oxide a few months ago. **Other countries** like England and the Netherlands have already banned laughing gas possession outside medical contexts. But in the United States, on a federal level the **FDA regulates it** and slots it under a class of “direct food substances affirmed as generally recognized as safe.”

Experts who spoke to GQ said irregular use typically won’t cause severe damage, at least if you’re not standing up or in motion, when loss of consciousness could lead to injury. Hitting it over and over again can cause “numbness, tingling in the arms and legs, and weakness,” according to Dr. Sarah MacLean, a Professor at La Trobe University who’s studied nitrous oxide user data. People can also faint from oxygen deprivation (which doesn’t happen in medical situations, because doctors will typically administer oxygen at the same time as laughing gas) and experience frostbite. More seriously, oxide impairs the body’s ability to metabolize b12 vitamins, which leads to neurological issues. One woman from the UK **couldn’t walk for weeks** in 2023 after she overdosed on whippets and doctors discovered inflammation on her brain and spinal cords.

In the last month, Galaxy Gas—and videos of people screwing around with the substance, or advising against frying your body with it—has become inescapable online. TikTok, Instagram, and X are suffocated with clips of people hitting canisters—and jokes about how Galaxy Gas will make everyone brain-dead. A drug that has long been tolerated in jam band parking lots has rapidly taken on a scarier sheen, with people panicking that it’s about to destroy a new generation of youth. The singer **SZA** wrote a **very viral tweet** calling out the “childlike designs” and “bright colors” of Galaxy Gas and alleged it’s being mass-marketed to Black children.

The current craze really kicked off in July, when an **Instagram Reel** posted by a wing and burger spot called Lost In Da Souse Kitchen in College Park, Georgia went megaviral. In the video, a customer in a black Nike mask and blue hoodie tugs on a tall canister of Galaxy Gas. “My name Lil T man, uhh,” he croaks in a voice resembling that of a goblin with pneumonia. As he rifles through a tray of fries and wings, his voice gradually softens and squeaks up, returning to a normal pitch. The doofy clip racked up over 35 million views and set the internet ablaze

with copycat memes. Video makers imitated the masked man's darkly gruff inflection, speculated about who he was (his identity was never uncovered), and recreated the **moment in Roblox**.

Recreational nitrous oxide use was once a respectable pastime. In the 19th century, it was used to seek “anesthetic revelations” by students and distinguished personas conducting spiritual research. The philosopher and psychologist **William James experimented with it** to access metaphysical insights. You can find his descendents in the large online subculture for nitrous oxide obsessives, with a bevy of codewords and techniques to minimize potential harms. People deploy “hyper breathing” or the “Wim Hof method”—a type of hyperventilating pioneered by the Dutch extreme athlete known for being able to deal with really cold temperatures—to maximize the dizzy thrill of a whippet hit. “Fishing out” means fainting. Some users try to selfprotect by dosing themselves with b12 supplements. Veteran users will combine whippets with other drugs to multiply the effects, and write trip reports about epiphanies they had. Some report seeing visions of the “**fourth dimension**.”

Now, nitrous is becoming synonymous with online brainrot—a drug counterpart for our era of Hawk Tuah gibberish and crash-out influencers like **Fulcrum**, whose whole shtick is getting mega-fried off drugs. The internet is inundated with concerns about how young kids will be stunted by widespread Galaxy Gas addictions. (In a somewhat unrelated story that **helped gin up chatter** about Galaxy Gas, Milo Yiannopoulos, the right-wing troll and former Chief of Staff for Kanye West, **alleged** the rapper was addicted to nitrous oxide. He leaked purported texts and alleged that West's celebrity dentist had introduced it to him.)

The eponymous company behind Galaxy Gas, founded in 2021, says online that its products should only be used for culinary purposes. The website even has in-depth recipes on how to make everything from “Nitrous Pesto Cream Sauce” to “Chicken Satay with Peanut Chili Foam.” In a statement to GQ, a spokesperson said Galaxy Gas is for “responsible culinary use only,” and that the company is “deeply concerned about the recent news reports and social media posts of individuals illegally misusing our products. Both our terms of use and conditions of sale strictly prohibit unlawful use, misuse or appeal to children.”



Regardless of what the company says, it's clear that consumers have discovered the abuse potential in these products. Nor has the company adjusted its garish, colorful branding. Websites for smoke shops in states across the nation list Galaxy Gas next to dab pens and bongs.

People aren't just hitting Galaxy Gas for online gags—it's increasingly showing up in real-life streets, particularly in Atlanta. Imyouski, a 22-year-old from the city, who, like others in this story, asked to be identified by a nickname to candidly discuss drug use, has done over 10 canisters and made a YouTube video about getting baked on Galaxy Gas. He told me it's sold in all the local smoke shops. "It's like an epidemic, all the young folks are on them," he said. "It's too obtainable, I could literally drive down the street right now and go grab me how many I want... One day, somebody's gonna wanna see how high they can get off that, and they overdose."

Imyouski criticized how Galaxy Gas is being "pushed out" to the public by retailers. He said many smoke shops are offering buy-one-get-one discounts on canisters, which can go for between \$60 and \$100, to coax people into getting more so their supply never runs out. He said one canister typically lasts a day. The euphoria makes it hard to resist buying as much as possible. "It's like an air head—your brain just numb, your whole body numb," Imyouski explained. "That's the scary part: it makes you feel so good."

Dr. MacLean said whippets seem to have a "relatively low level of physiological dependence," but it's worrying if socially isolated or lonely people "get really stuck in a habit of doing heaps and heaps of [nitrous oxide] alone in their bedroom without anyone there to look after them if they pass out." Rather than outright outlawing the drug, she believes education must improve. "Not like, 'Don't do it, you're gonna die.' More like, explaining that if you're gonna do it, keep that use not everyday, minimize the number you use, use with other people."

Others are less concerned about its harms. KB, a 17-year-old rapper from the southside of Atlanta, told me Galaxy Gas is everywhere, and that he's personally done "probably over a million hits." His favorite flavor is Blueberry Mango. "This shit makes me feel good, it's a lot to explain," he said, adding that some of the whippets are CBD-infused, which adds to the pleasurable sensation. He says he's seen kids as young as six or seven years old hitting whippets.

KB recently gained traction with “Whippets,” an unofficial theme song for the Galaxy Gas mania. The nitrous turns his voice deep and burbly as he raps about getting geeked and having sex on whippets. “I was the first one to do it—I don’t think nobody did a whippet on a track before,” he said. In the hyperactive music video, he and a crew of friends swagger around slinging dozens of Galaxy Gas canisters; he crosses the street with one in each hand and a third tucked in his pants. “Off the whippet, you know how that go!” he groans on the hook.

Dr. Joseph Palamar, an associate professor at NYU Langone who studies drug use, said he’s noticed an increase in inhalant use among the youth. He’s especially worried by Galaxy Gas’ flavored options, which could make it appealing to young people. He compared the tricky regulatory situation to how the “date rape” club drug GHB is often sold as a “tiny little bottle of computer cleaner” to evade bans. “If these types of [smoke] shops are selling it—to me, that clearly suggests they know why a lot of people desire this product: to misuse it. Does this mean it should be taken off the market? I don’t know. Maybe there needs to be an age limit. Maybe it needs some more regulations,” Dr. Palamar said. “I would assume the next step might be for the FDA to get involved.”

The chorus of fear and condemnation is intensifying by the day. A recent tweet with over 300,000 likes suggested whippets were becoming “a national emergency.” The livestreaming site Kick, known as the more anarchic version of Twitch, just banned creators from using Galaxy Gas on stream.

Despite having some fun with whippets, Imyouski himself is pretty adamant that the trend has gone too far, and it’s time to stop fooling around. “I started thinking about it, and I’m like, this is really killing us, for real,” he said. “Put the Galaxy Gas down. We’re not bringing it into 2025.”