

# Fact Sheet

# COCAINE

## What is Cocaine?

Cocaine is a powerful drug that comes from the leaves of the coca bush, a plant grown in South America. It's sold as a white powder that is most often snorted (inhaled through the nostrils), but it can also be dissolved in water and injected. Powder cocaine can be chemically changed to create forms of cocaine that can be smoked. These forms, known as "freebase" and "crack", look like crystals or rocks.

The cocaine you can buy on the street is rarely pure. Often, it's mixed with other substances, like talcum powder or dextrose, or with other drugs, like amphetamines. Cocaine is also known as "coke", "C", "snow", "flake" or "blow".

## What Does Cocaine Do to the Body?

Cocaine is a powerful stimulant that affects the brain. All forms of cocaine have the same effects. It produces a short-lived high that is immediately followed by opposite, intense feelings of depression, edginess, and craving for more of the drug.

If snorted, cocaine reaches the brain in three to five minutes and the "high" lasts about 60 to 90 minutes. Injecting cocaine produces a "rush" in 15-30 seconds and lasts 20 to 60 minutes. Smoking produces an almost immediate intense experience and lasts only five to ten minutes.

When users come down or "crash", they feel very depressed, anxious, and irritable. Many users take repeated doses to keep the high going and avoid the crash. Others try to modify the effects or stop the binges with other drugs like alcohol, tranquilizers or heroin.

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## Short Term Effects

All forms of cocaine have the same effects.

- Increased alertness, high energy and euphoria followed by agitation, anxiety and decreased appetite.
- Increased blood pressure
- Rapid heartbeat and breathing
- Sweating

In large amounts cocaine can cause:

- Shallow breathing
- Seizures
- Stroke
- Unpredictable or violent behaviour
- Twitching
- Hallucinations
- Chest pain
- Blurred vision
- Vomiting
- Heart attack
- Feelings of paranoia, anger, hostility and anxiety even when the “high” is gone

## Long Term Effects

- Injecting cocaine can cause infections from needles or impurities in the drug. Sharing needles can cause hepatitis, HIV/AIDS or other diseases.
- Snorting cocaine can damage tissue in the nose. Over time, snorting cocaine can cause sinus infections and loss of smell, stuffed, runny chapped or bleeding noses, and holes in the barrier separating the nostrils.
- Smoking cocaine can damage the lungs and cause “crack lung”. Symptoms include severe chest pain, breathing problems and high temperatures. This can be fatal.
- Weight loss
- Malnutrition
- Sexual problems (like difficulty getting an erection)
- Severe psychiatric symptoms including psychosis, anxiety, depression and paranoia.

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## What Are The Risks?.

- People who inject cocaine, especially if they share needles, are at risk of getting infectious diseases like hepatitis and HIV.
- A person can overdose on even a small amount of cocaine. There is no antidote to cocaine overdose.
- Loss of interest in other areas of their life, like school, friends, sports
- Cocaine use is linked with risk-taking and violence. This increases the chance of getting hurt.
- Trouble with the law
- Addiction
- May use other drugs while using cocaine and may not realize it. Mixing cocaine with alcohol or other drugs makes overdose more likely.
- You never know what you are getting. There are a lot of substances that look like white powder. Dealers are not always honest.
- You may do something you regret later.
- The chemicals used in making crack can catch fire which adds to the danger
- Cocaine use during pregnancy may hurt the baby. The mother is more likely to have a miscarriage, have a baby born too early or have a smaller baby. There is also the risk that the baby will be addicted to cocaine when he/she is born.

## Addiction

Cocaine is addictive. It interferes with the way your brain processes chemicals that create feelings of pleasure, so you need more and more of the drug just to feel normal.

People who become addicted to cocaine lose control over their use of the drug. They feel a strong need for cocaine, even when they know it causes them medical, psychological and social problems. Getting and taking cocaine can become the most important thing in their lives.

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## Addiction (con't)

Cocaine causes people to “crash” when they stop using it. When they “crash”, their mood swings rapidly from high to distress. This brings powerful cravings for more of the drug. Bingeing to stay high leads quickly to addiction.

Symptoms of Cocaine withdrawal can include exhaustion, extended and restless sleep or sleeplessness, hunger, irritability, depression, suicidal thoughts and intense cravings for more of the drug. The memory of the high experienced when using cocaine is powerful and brings a strong risk of relapse to drug use.