

FACT SHEET

Cocaine and Crack

Cocaine is an odorless, white crystal powder that can be snorted, smoked or injected. It comes from the leaves of the coca bush, which grows in the Andes Mountains in South America. Street names for cocaine include: snow, powder lines, freebase, c, dust, crack, rock, coke, flake and blow.

Cocaine is a very addictive stimulant drug. Stimulants make people feel more alert and energetic. When snorted or injected, cocaine takes effect in minutes, and the effect may last up to one hour. When cocaine is smoked, high doses of the drug reach the brain in seconds. Although the effect lasts

only five to ten minutes, smoking produces an intense high that may lead to addiction more quickly than snorting.

Crack is cocaine in a form that can be easily smoked; it is rock-like and made from cocaine powder, baking soda and/or ammonia. Crack is the most addictive form of cocaine. The effects of crack last 10 to 15 minutes.

All forms of cocaine can lead to addiction. It partly depends on how much a person uses, and how often he or she uses it.

Effects of Short-Term Use

While using cocaine or crack a person may experience:

- enlarged pupils, dry mouth, stuffy nose
- more energy, alertness
- less of a need to sleep
- increased blood pressure and breathing
- feelings of euphoria
- reduced appetite
- increased heart rate

High doses may cause such effects as:

- anxiety, blurred vision
- hearing or seeing things that are not there

- muscle spasms
- unpredictable or violent behaviour
- headache, chest pain, fever
- nausea

Single high doses have been known to contribute to seizures or death from stroke, heart attack or breathing problems.

Cocaine causes blood vessels to thicken and constrict, reducing the flow of oxygen to the heart. Cocaine causes the heart muscle to work harder, leading to heart attack or stroke, even in healthy people. Cocaine raises blood pressure, which can explode weakened blood vessels in the brain.

A person can overdose on even a small amount of cocaine. Overdose can cause seizures and heart failure. It can cause breathing to become weak or stop altogether. There is no antidote to counteract a cocaine overdose.

Effects of Long-Term Use

After heavy use of cocaine or crack over a long period of time, a person may experience:

- chapped skin under the nose and damage inside the nose if snorted
- throat or lung irritations when smoked
- problems experiencing pleasure without the drug
- headaches



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- sexual dysfunction in men
- memory and attention problems
- tooth decay
- weakened immune system
- heart problems or stroke
- behaviour problems
- hallucinations
- eating disorders
- intense depression, paranoia
- seizures

Cocaine and Dependency

Regular users can rapidly develop a powerful psychological dependence and a physical dependence.

Tolerance (a need for more of the drug to achieve the same effect) may occur in some users, but not in others. When the cocaine high fades, people can have a big low (a “crash”). They may feel anxious, depressed, tired, hungry or even suicidal.

Sources:

- Addictions Foundation of Manitoba (AFM)
- Alberta Alcohol and Drug Addiction Commission (AADAC)
- Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH)