

Facts about Cocaine

Cocaine is a stimulant. The drug is a white powder made from the leaves of the South American coca plant. Cocaine belongs to a class of drugs known as stimulants, which tend to give a temporary illusion of limitless power and energy. Cocaine is usually snorted through the nose; occasionally it may be injected. The drug bought on the street is often a mixture of cocaine with other substances. "Crack" is a smokeable form of cocaine that usually looks like small rocks or lumps of soap.

Cocaine affects bodily functions. The immediate effects include dilated pupils and narrowing of blood vessels. Cocaine and crack also cause increases in blood pressure, heart rate, breathing rate, and body temperature. Users lose their appetites and have trouble sleeping. At first, the drug elevates the user's mood, but the effects soon wear off. Then the user's mind and body slide into a depression characterized by a "let down" feeling, dullness, tenseness, and edginess.

Cocaine is an addictive drug. A very great danger for all cocaine and crack users is addiction. Dependency on cocaine and crack is so strong that these drugs dominate all aspects of an addict's life: it can destroy physical and mental health, drain financial resources, drive away family and friends, and destroy careers. Addiction to crack can be especially rapid, because it causes such a quick and dramatic "high" followed by such a miserable "low" that leaves the user craving more.

Cocaine is dangerous to your health. Besides addiction, cocaine and crack can cause other medical problems, including death. In some people, a single dose of cocaine can produce seizures, heart and respiratory failure, or strokes (ruptured blood vessels in the brain). Users who inject cocaine, and who use unsterile or shared needles, may infect themselves with hepatitis or AIDS.

Cocaine affects brain function. In addition to causing strokes and brains seizures that may cause the heart and breathing to stop, cocaine's effects on the brain may include impaired thinking, confusion, anxiety, or depression. Tempers are often short, panic attacks common, and users may become very paranoid and suspicious. Continued use may result in psychosis.

The obsessive, drug-seeking behavior of cocaine and crack users seems to be due to the drug's overwhelming influence on the "reward center" in the brain. "Cocaine psychosis" - violent erratic, or paranoid behavior - can sometimes accompany use of these drugs. Users may believe they have superhuman powers. Hallucinations are also common - users may hear or see things that don't exist. Profound personality changes may occur. Continued use may cause a partial or total break with reality.

More Facts

- When users snort or inject cocaine or smoke crack, they are almost always ingesting something else besides the drug.
- The purity of powdered cocaine obtained by most users ranges widely from 30 to 95 percent, since most is "cut" with other substances by the seller to increase profits. These fillers include sugars, inexpensive stimulants, anesthetics, and other drugs.
- The impurities increase the hazards of taking already risky drugs because users have no way of knowing how much cocaine they are giving themselves.
- In addition, some of the added impurities can cause serious side effects, such as stomach cramps, high blood pressure, nervousness, and increased heart rate.
- Cocaine or crack use any time during pregnancy, even one-time use, may cause miscarriages, stillbirths, or premature labor and delivery.
- Sometimes, when the drug causes the placenta to separate early, the lives of both mother and baby are in danger due to bleeding and shock.
- Babies exposed to cocaine in the womb often don't cuddle or nurse well, and may be generally irritable and unresponsive, making them hard to take care of.
- Some cocaine-exposed babies have suffered strokes before birth or heart attacks after delivery. Infants born to cocaine-using mothers may have congenital birth defects, including brain damage.
- Nursing mothers can pass cocaine to their babies through breast milk. Although the effects of such exposure are as yet unknown, babies fed milk containing cocaine may be likely to suffer some of the same heart and brain problems as adults.

If you or a family member is experiencing a mental health or an alcohol or other drug-related emergency, seek immediate assistance by calling the 24-hour Suicide Prevention, Mental Health Crisis, Information and Referral Hotline: (216) 623-6888 or the United Way's First Call for Help, 211 or (216) 436-2000.