



For further information:

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**Cocaine**

# Cocaine

*Coke, Charlie, Snow*

## What does it look like?



## What is cocaine?

Cocaine hydrochloride is a white powder manufactured from the leaves of the coca plant found in South America. It is a stimulant drug and, as such, has a powerful effect on the central nervous system. It is also a local anaesthetic. Cocaine powder is most often snorted although sometimes injected.

## What will it do to me?

The high from snorting is relatively slow in onset, and may last 15 to 30 minutes. The drug prompts the release of dopamine, a chemical in the brain responsible for pleasure and movement, and inhibits its reabsorption, which leads to overstimulation of the brain. People report feelings of euphoria, confidence, talkativeness and alertness to sights and sounds etc. Cocaine also reduces your appetite and need for sleep. The pleasurable effects wear off quickly and, once they do, withdrawal symptoms can include irritability, anxiety, restlessness, insomnia, depression, paranoia, or aggression. These symptoms are likely to increase in severity with the amount of cocaine used or if used for a prolonged period. Typically after use, you will 'crash', becoming lethargic and typically needing to sleep for long periods of time.

Cocaine users frequently report that coming down from the drug is difficult, leading them to take more to keep the high going and avoid withdrawal. This is one of the reasons why people can quickly develop a cocaine dependency. Many people report depression immediately after taking the drug and for days after.

The short-term physical effects of cocaine include narrowed blood vessels, dilated pupils, increased temperature, heart rate

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and blood pressure. Large amounts may also lead to bizarre, erratic, and aggressive behavior.

This may result in a full-blown paranoid psychosis, in which the individual loses touch with reality and experiences auditory hallucinations.

Although cocaine is not physically addictive, it can cause powerful psychological dependence.

## When does it become a problem?

- In rare instances, sudden death can occur on the first use of cocaine or unexpectedly thereafter. Cocaine-related deaths are often a result of heart attacks or seizures followed by stopping breathing.
- Physical signs can include swelling and bleeding of mucus membranes and general damage to the nasal cavities, neglect of physical needs such as sleep and eating and poor personal hygiene.
- Psychological or emotional problems might include constant low moods and depression, mood swings and increased aggression. You may experience social isolation and experience feelings of paranoia and anxiety which can result in being unable to cope with social situations.
- Nothing is as important as coke and life seems to have no meaning without it – it occupies a lot of your time either doing it or thinking about doing it. Amount and frequency of use are increasing. You need more and more to get the same effect.
- Change in friends – making new friends who do it and neglecting old friends who don't.

- Neglect of family or work responsibilities – letting people down or being late for or missing work or college.
- Spending more money than you have on it which can lead to debt and selling of personal property.

## Staying safer

- Avoid mixing cocaine with other drugs – taking it with other stimulants (ecstasy, amphetamine etc) can put excessive strain on the heart.
- Avoid mixing it with alcohol - because of the stimulant effects of cocaine, people drink more than they are accustomed to without feeling the depressant effects of alcohol. Cocaine wears off very quickly, leaving you more intoxicated than you thought you were.
- Alcohol and cocaine forms an enzyme in the body called "cocaethylene". This is more toxic and can lead to increased risks of liver damage, heart attacks, fits and epilepsy.
- Keep your use as low as possible and take breaks from using. Cocaine use can quickly get out of control and become compulsive.
- Sleep and eat – having used cocaine it is important for the body to rebalance. This will require catching up on sleep and eating well.

## The Law

Under the Misuse of Drugs Act, 1971 cocaine is a Class A drug:

### Penalties

- Possession:** up to 7 years imprisonment and/or fine.  
**Supply:** up to life imprisonment and/or fine.