

Cocaine and Crack

Cocaine (also known as blow, C, coke or rock) is a highly addictive drug. It is a white, odourless powder that comes from the leaves of the plant, *coca bush*. Crack is made by dissolving cocaine and boiling it with other ingredients until it forms lumps (or rocks). When the rocks are heated, they make a crackling sound. This is where the name ‘crack’ comes from.

Seizures, heart failure, burst blood vessels in the brain and death can occur from a single time use.

Short-Term Effects

Cocaine and Crack are unpredictable and affect everyone differently. After using cocaine or crack, you may feel agitated and nervous or you may feel calm and mentally alert. Use of these drugs can cause an increase in blood pressure and heart rate, rapid breathing, pupil dilation, nausea and vomiting, high body temperature, cold sweat, hallucinations, tremors, and muscle twitching. Using cocaine or crack in binges – repeated use over a short period of time at higher and higher doses – can cause depression, mood swings, restlessness, and anxiety. Overdose can result even when using a small amount of the drug.

Long-Term Effects

Long-term cocaine and crack use can cause you to see, hear, and feel things that are not actually there. Your behaviour may become erratic, bizarre or violent. You may have trouble sleeping and may become uninterested in food. When you don't eat enough food you may not get the nutrition and minerals your body needs to develop and function. You may also have sexual problems, high blood pressure, an irregular heartbeat, a heart attack, respiratory failure, a stroke or seizure.

Injecting cocaine can result in allergic reactions. Sharing needles can lead to increased risk of contracting HIV/AIDS and other blood-borne diseases.

Snorting cocaine can cause nosebleeds and a red, chapped, running nose. It may also cause you to lose your sense of smell. Smoking cocaine can cause chest pain and breathing difficulties.

How does it work?

Cocaine and crack can be injected (using a needle to shoot liquid into the veins), smoked (inhaling vapours into the lungs), or snorted (inhaling powder through the nose). When the drug enters the bloodstream it travels to the brain. When the drug reaches the brain, it changes the chemicals to produce a feeling of pleasure or a ‘high’.

Cocaine, Crack and Dependency

Cocaine and crack can be very addictive.

Repeated use can cause long-term changes to your brain and can lead to tolerance of the drug, both physically (your *body* needs it) and psychologically (you *feel* you need it). People who ‘use’ crack or cocaine regularly may have constant cravings. They often will increase the amount they take to try to feel the same high as they did from their first exposure to the drug. Often, they are not able to

achieve that same 'high'. Increasing the amount taken increases the risk of short-term and long-term effects. Someone who suddenly stops using the drug may experience withdrawal symptoms such as exhaustion, restless sleep, hunger, irritability, depression, suicidal thoughts and intense craving for the drug.

Did you know?

Combining cocaine and alcohol is dangerous because it increases cocaine's effect and increases your risk of sudden death.

Crack users have a higher risk of contracting diseases like HIV, hepatitis C, sexually transmitted infections, and tuberculosis.

Use of cocaine during pregnancy increases your risk of miscarriage and premature delivery. It can cause babies to be irritable and have trouble feeding and sleeping. The infant may have physical problems including low birth weight and a smaller head. The infant may also be very irritable and have seizures if breastfed by mothers who use the drug.

Whom to contact if you need help regarding drug use?

Contact your local Addictions/Mental Health Services office, doctor or other health care provider if you need more information. To locate Addictions/Mental Health Services near you here are some options:

- visit saskatchewan.ca/addictions;
- check the green pages of your phone book for your local health region's services;
- visit HealthLine Online at healthlineonline.ca; or
- contact HealthLine at 811 and ask to speak to an Addictions or Mental Health Counsellor.



NOTE: This material is for information only and should not replace advice from an Addictions or Mental Health Counsellor, doctor or other health care provider.

To access fact sheets sources please contact the Saskatchewan Ministry of Health at (306) 787-7239.