

Safer Ways to Use Cocaine and Crack

Cocaine is also called blow, C, coke, flake, powder or rock. A person could become addicted to this illegal drug fairly easily. Crack is made by boiling cocaine with baking soda until it forms lumps (or rocks). When the rocks are heated, they make a crackling sound. This is where the name “crack” comes from.

Crack use and addiction

If you use crack a lot or over a long period of time you could become addicted to it. The feelings that crack gives you don't last long so people sometimes try to get that good feeling back. This can lead to addiction and feeling that you need crack to get through everyday life.

Smoking crack even once is dangerous. It can give you “cravings” where you feel that you want or need to use it again and again. Sometimes people use these drugs so they can deal with life's problems. However, there is help available. Please see contact information at the end of this fact sheet.

Smoking crack even once is dangerous.

How can you keep yourself safe?

The safest thing to do is to not use cocaine/crack at all.

However if you do use this drug, here are some things that will help keep you safe:

1. Think about what you use to smoke cocaine/crack:

- **Always use your own pipe:** A small amount of blood can carry Hepatitis C. People who use crack are at risk of getting diseases like HIV, Hepatitis C, sexually transmitted infections, and tuberculosis. Even if the person you are using with has the same health condition as you, don't share.
- **Use a pyrex pipe:** Pipes can be unsafe if they are made of plastic, worn or thin glass, cans or copper. Pipes are sometimes hot, and can cut, burn, or harm your mouth and hands. Pyrex pipes are safest; they do not break down when heated so burns are less frequent.

- **Use pipe screens:** Don't use steel wool as a screen. Chemicals from the steel wool can harm your lungs. Pieces of steel wool can also break off and burn your lips and mouth.
- **Mouthpiece:** If you're going to share pipes, it's best for each person to use their own mouthpiece. Attach a plastic/rubber mouthpiece to the end of the pipe to prevent burns. A mouthpiece can be made using rubber bands, tape or cardboard.
- 2. **Don't use alcohol and/or other drugs: This can be very dangerous.**
- 3. **Take breaks and cut back on how much you use:** You could try to wait a half hour to an hour before using the drug again. You could try and wait a few days or weeks between using the drug. This will give your body and brain time to rest. If you take breaks it can help shorten the “burnout” that follows a binge.

4. **Carry condoms:** If you use crack/cocaine you are more likely to have unprotected sex. Protect yourself from sexually transmitted infections, HIV and Hepatitis C. Use a condom.

5. **Avoid driving under the influence of cocaine/crack:** You can suffer attacks of paranoia, hallucinations or mood swings while driving. Drug use can make you feel invincible. You may lose concentration, increasing the risk of collision and injury.

6. **Get rid of your pipes and needles in safe ways:** When you are done using your crack pipe or if it's no longer safe to use, put it into a proper container. This can help stop the spread of disease and harm to others. Some health centers, doctor offices, and harm reduction sites have these.

They are:

- made of a strong plastic;
- able to close with a tight-fitting lid so they don't leak; and
- labeled so that you know exactly what it's for.

A sharps container is best but if you do not have one, a plastic peanut butter jar, bleach container or puncture proof sealed container will work.

Need more information? See Canada's Source for HIV and Hepatitis C Information (Canadian Aids Treatment Information Exchange) at

<http://www.catie.ca/en/pif/fall-2014/safer-crack-cocaine-smoking-equipment-distribution-comprehensive-best-practice-guideli>.

How can you break free from using cocaine/crack?

It may feel impossible to quit because your cravings to use can be so strong. However, know that these feelings don't have to last forever. You may need support from a health care provider as well as from friends and family. An Addictions Counsellor or other health care provider can help you figure out ways to quit or cut down your cocaine/crack use. They can give information about helpful services such as detox, treatment and/or self-help groups.

The safest thing to do is not use cocaine/crack at all.

Things you can do to help you in the meantime include: don't carry bank cards or too much money as that can tempt you to buy the drugs. Also, try to stay away from people and places where you know there will be drugs or others using drugs.

Who can you 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 www.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.