

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 rocks (or lumps). When the rocks are heated, they make a crackling sound. This is where the name “crack” comes from.

Short-term Effects

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.

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

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.

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.

Cocaine and crack can be very addictive.

How does it work?

Cocaine and crack can be injected (a needle is used to shoot liquid into the veins), smoked (vapours are inhaled into the lungs), or snorted (powder is inhaled through the nose). When the drug enters the bloodstream it travels to the brain. When the drug reaches the brain it produces a feeling of pleasure or a high.

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

Cocaine, Crack and Dependency

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 after their first use of the drug. However they may become tolerant to the drug and taking more of it may not produce the same high. Suddenly stopping use of the drug may cause problems as well. You could 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 the effects of cocaine 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. If breastfed by a mother who uses cocaine, an infant can be fussy and have seizures.

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 services near you:

- Visit saskatchewan.ca/addictions.
- Visit HealthLine Online at healthlineonline.ca.
- Call HealthLine at 811. Specially trained staff are available to provide mental health and addictions crisis support, in a safe and confidential manner.



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

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