

# Cocaine



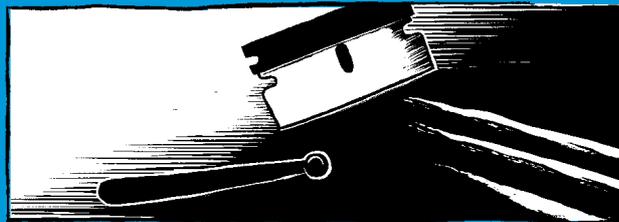
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**NSW HEALTH**

### What is cocaine?

Cocaine is a drug made from the leaves of the coca plant. This plant is processed in different ways to make different types of cocaine.

Cocaine is a stimulant drug. This means it speeds up the brain and nervous system.



### Types of cocaine

#### 1. Cocaine hydrochloride

This is the white powder type of cocaine most common in Australia. In this form it is sniffed through the nose ('snorted') or injected. It cannot be smoked because burning destroys it.

#### 2. 'Freebase' cocaine

This is a chemically changed type of cocaine (alkaloidal cocaine). It can be smoked and this makes the user feel 'high' quickly.

### 3. 'Crack' cocaine

Crack is a type of freebase cocaine sold in the form of small crystals or 'rocks'. It is usually smoked. Crack is rare in Australia at this stage.

People who sell cocaine often mix or 'cut' the powder with other things that look the same, to make the drug go further. Some mixed-in substances can have unpleasant or harmful effects. It is difficult to tell what the drug actually contains.

### Effects

What cocaine does to you depends on:

- how much you take
- the type of cocaine you take
- your height and weight
- your general health
- your mood
- your past experience with cocaine
- whether you use cocaine on its own or with other drugs
- whether you use alone or with others, at home or at a party, etc.

## Immediate effects

### Small amounts

When you have a small amount of cocaine, the effects can last from a few minutes to a few hours.

You may:

- feel good and confident
- be excited or upset
- take more risks than usual
- be less hungry
- feel alert and energetic
- feel aggressive
- want to have sex.



Effects on your body may include that:

- your heart beats faster
- your body temperature rises
- the pupils in your eyes get bigger
- you move more quickly than usual.

#### **Large amounts**

If you take a large amount of cocaine you might:

- get headaches
- feel dizzy
- feel restless
- become violent or aggressive
- find it hard to concentrate
- lose interest in sex
- not feel like doing anything
- have chest pain
- have a heart attack
- have convulsions (fits)
- overdose (see below)
- have psychosis - a serious psychological problem when you hear voices, imagine things, get frightened that others want to hurt you.

### Long-term effects

If you use cocaine often and for a long time you may:

- become dependent
- become aggressive, violent or have more arguments than usual
- have relationship, work, money, legal or housing problems.

The way a person takes cocaine over a long time can also cause some problems:

- Snorting cocaine can lead to nosebleeds, sinus problems and damage inside the nose.
- Injecting cocaine with used or dirty needles or other equipment makes you more likely to get infected with hepatitis C, hepatitis B and/or HIV, get blood poisoning (septicaemia) and skin abscesses (sores with pus).
- Injecting cocaine over a long time can result in:
  - blocked blood vessels (caused by the things sometimes mixed with cocaine) leading to serious damage to the body's organs such as the liver, heart etc.
  - inflamed blood vessels and abscesses
  - a person picking at their own skin, sometimes resulting in serious damage that needs skin grafts (operations) to heal.

- Smoking freebase cocaine (crack) can cause breathing difficulties, a long-term cough, chest pain and lung damage.



### Overdose

Overdose of cocaine can happen to anyone. Even small amounts may cause overdose with some people who have an especially strong reaction to it.

When a person overdoses, it may cause:

- faster, irregular or weak heart beat
- breathing problems
- heart failure
- bleeding blood vessels in the brain
- death.

### Mixing cocaine with other drugs

People who use cocaine sometimes take other drugs at the same time to cope with some of the things cocaine does to the body. Some people take drugs such as minor tranquillisers, alcohol, marijuana or heroin to help them sleep.

This can make you dependent on several drugs at once. For example, some people need cocaine each day to get them going and minor tranquillisers each night to get to sleep. This type of dependence can lead to many serious physical and psychological problems.

Mixing different drugs can also make you more likely to overdose.

### Cocaine and pregnancy

Using cocaine when you are pregnant may increase the chance of losing the baby before it is born, having the baby too early and other problems. Babies of cocaine-using mothers tend to weigh less and may get withdrawal symptoms from the mother's cocaine use. Little is known about the long-term effects on the child as it grows.

### Cocaine and the law

Using, keeping, selling or giving cocaine to someone else is illegal. If you are caught you could get penalties starting from a \$2 200 fine and/or two years in jail to a \$550 000 fine and/or jail for life.

### Cocaine and driving

Cocaine can make you feel more confident when you drive. This can make you take dangerous risks and have accidents. It is illegal to drive under the influence of drugs, including cocaine. Penalties include losing your licence, a fine and/or jail.

### Tolerance and dependence

Anyone can develop a 'tolerance' to cocaine. Tolerance means that you must take more of the drug to feel the same effects you used to have with lower amounts.

'Dependence' on cocaine means that it takes up a lot of your thoughts, emotions and activities.

Dependence on cocaine can lead to a variety of health, money, legal, work and relationship problems.

Not all people who use cocaine are dependent.

## Withdrawal

Cocaine-dependent people may find it very hard to stop using or cut down because of withdrawal symptoms.

These can include:

- wanting cocaine very badly (cravings)
- feeling angry or upset
- feeling sick
- vomiting
- shaking
- tiredness
- weakness
- hunger
- long but disturbed sleep
- muscle pain
- deep depression (feeling very down or sad)
- wanting to kill yourself.

These symptoms are usually fairly short-lived and most withdrawing people don't need medication. However, if you are worried about withdrawal, contact your doctor or health centre.

**24 hr confidential telephone counselling service**

**NSW**

Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS) -  
24hr hotline Ph: (02) 9361 2111  
Toll free: 1800 422 599

**Victoria**

Direct Line Ph: (03) 9416 1818 • Toll free: 1800 136 385

**Western Australia**

Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS) -  
24hr hotline Ph: (08) 9442 5000 • Toll free: 1800 198 024

**Queensland**

Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS) -  
24hr hotline Ph: (07) 3236 2414 • Toll free: 1800 177 833

**South Australia**

Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS) -  
• Toll free: 1300 131 340

**Northern Territory**

Amity Community Service Ph: (08) 8981 8030  
Toll free: 1800 629 683

**Tasmania**

Alcohol and Drug Service South  
Toll free: 1800 811 994

**ACT**

24 hour Alcohol and Drug Help line  
Ph: (02) 6205 4545



The information in this document can be accessed through the NSW HealthWeb site: [www.health.nsw.gov.au](http://www.health.nsw.gov.au) or directly viewed from CEIDA's website: [www.ceida.net.au](http://www.ceida.net.au).

Further copies are available from CEIDA by phoning (02) 9818 0444.

Other publications in this series include *Marijuana, Alcohol, Heroin and Speed*.

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