

COCAINE: THE FACTS

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

Cocaine hydrochloride

This is the white powder type of cocaine most commonly available in Australia. In this form it is commonly sniffed through the nose (snorted) or injected.

Freebase cocaine

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

Crack cocaine

Crack is a type of freebase cocaine sold in the form of small crystals or rocks. It is usually smoked or injected. Crack is less available in Australia.

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

COCAINE RELATED EMERGENCY

If you can't wake someone up or you are concerned that they may have sustained a head injury from a drug related fall – call an ambulance immediately – dial **Triple Zero (000)**.

If the person has been mixing cocaine with other drugs, tell the NSW Ambulance paramedic exactly what they have taken. Paramedics are there to help. Generally paramedics don't involve the police **unless** there is danger to themselves or other people/children, someone dies, or a crime (such as violence or theft) has been committed.

EFFECTS OF COCAINE

What cocaine does to you depends on:

- how much you take
- the type of cocaine you take and its purity
- 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.

The effects of taking cocaine can last from a few minutes to a few hours.

PHYSICAL EFFECTS

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
- you are less hungry
- you get headaches
- you feel dizzy
- you have chest pain
- you have a heart attack
- you have seizures/convulsions (fits)
- you overdose (see section on Overdose in this fact sheet).

PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS

You may:

- feel good and confident
- be excited or upset
- feel numb
- take more risks than usual
- want to have sex
- feel alert and energetic
- feel overly assertive or aggressive
- feel restless
- become violent or aggressive
- find it hard to concentrate
- not feel like doing anything
- lose interest in sex
- 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
- impair your capacity as a parent/primary carer of children.

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

- Snorting cocaine can lead to nosebleeds, sinus problems and sometimes permanent damage inside the nose
- Injecting cocaine with unsterile injecting equipment makes you more likely to contract blood borne viruses such as HIV, hepatitis B and C, and get blood poisoning (septicaemia) and skin abscesses (sores with pus). NEVER share fits (needles and syringes), spoons, water, filters, alcohol swabs or tourniquets.
- Injecting cocaine 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, brain
 - inflamed blood vessels and abscesses
 - a person picking at their own skin, sometimes resulting in serious damage that needs skin grafts (operations) to heal.

In NSW, free sterile injecting equipment is available from Needle and Syringe Program (NSP) outlets and from selected pharmacists. Call the Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS) for the nearest NSP outlet.

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

MIXING 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. Combining cocaine with another illicit drug can be fatal.

OVERDOSE

Overdose of cocaine is more likely to occur in people with pre-existing heart conditions or who are older. 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 heartbeat
- breathing problems
- heart attack and failure
- bleeding in the brain
- death
- seizures.

DRIVING UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF COCAINE

It is illegal to drive under the influence of drugs, including cocaine. If you break this law you could lose your licence for a set time, or be fined.

Cocaine can make you feel more confident if you drive. This can make you take dangerous risks and have accidents.

Anyone under the influence of cocaine, who kills or injures another person while driving can be sentenced to a term in prison.

THE LAW

Using cocaine is illegal. If you use, sell or give cocaine to someone else and get caught, you could face substantial fines and penalties including a prison sentence.

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

Not all people who use cocaine are dependent.

PREGNANCY AND BREASTFEEDING

Cocaine use during pregnancy can affect fetal development by increasing the heart rate of both the mother and the unborn baby, reducing the supply of blood and oxygen to the baby. There is also an increased risk of bleeding, miscarriage, premature labour and stillbirth. Inform antenatal staff of cocaine use and attend regular antenatal checkups.

Some research indicates that the children of women who use cocaine in pregnancy may experience long-term mental or physical effects.

Babies of mothers who regularly use cocaine during pregnancy tend to weigh less and may also experience withdrawal symptoms after birth.

It is likely that, if a mother continues to use cocaine while breastfeeding, the drug will be present in her milk, which may have adverse effects on the baby.

It is generally risky to take any drug while breastfeeding without medical advice.

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
- anxious
- hunger

- long but disturbed sleep
- muscle pain
- deep depression (feeling very down or sad)
- wanting to kill yourself.

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

SELF-HELP ASSOCIATIONS

na.org.au for **Narcotics Anonymous Australia**, a non profit organisation to help people abstain from drugs.

INFORMATION AND ADVICE

For free and confidential advice about alcohol and other drugs 24 hours, 7 days a week, call the **National Alcohol and Other Drug hotline: 1800 250 015**.

It will automatically direct you to the Alcohol and Drug Information Service in the state or territory you are calling from.

Call ADIS stimulant treatment line on (02) 9361 8088 or 1800 101 188 for advice, support, referral and consulting for people concerned about stimulants or information on the stimulant treatment program.

Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council provides links to Aboriginal community controlled health services across NSW. Visit www.ahmrc.org.au for information about AHMRC members including a regional map, information and links to members websites.

Drug and Alcohol Multicultural Education Centre (DAMEC) provides services for people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Contact DAMEC on (02) 8113 1301 or for counselling and support services for CALD communities call (02) 8706 0150.

Drug Info provides facts and resources on alcohol and other drugs and the prevention of related harm. Visit www.druginfo.adf.org.au

State Library of New South Wales Drug Info provides up to date information on alcohol and other drugs in public libraries throughout NSW. Visit www.druginfo.sl.nsw.gov.au

eheadspace provides mental health and wellbeing support, information and services for young people (12-25 years) and their family and friends.

Visit www.eheadspace.org.au

Family Drug Support provides 24-7 telephone support to families in crisis due to drug and alcohol issues. Call the Helpline on **1300 368 186** or visit www.fds.org.au

Kids Helpline is a free, 24 hour counselling service for young people aged 5 to 25 years. Counselling is offered via the Kids Helpline website www.kidshelp.com.au or email, or call **1800 55 1800**.

Nepean Youth Drug and Alcohol Service (NYDAS) works within a holistic model of care to address a range of issues for young people (12 –20 years of age) related to their alcohol and other drug use. Call (02) 4734 2129 or (02) 4734 1333.

NSW Users and AIDS Association (NUAA) is a peak drug user organisation in NSW providing harm reduction information and blood borne virus prevention peer education. Visit www.nuaa.org.au

Poisons Information Centre is a 24/7 call centre service available across Australia. Call **13 11 26**

ReachOut is an Australian online youth mental health service with a mobile-friendly site and forums where you can access help, information and support. Visit au.reachout.com

Sexual Health Info Link provides free and confidential sexual health support and information. Visit www.shil.nsw.gov.au

TAFE NSW provides help with education, career development or personal matters. Students can contact a local TAFE/ university counsellor. Visit www.tafensw.edu.au

Youth Action is the peak organisation for young people in NSW. Visit www.youthaction.org.au and use the search option to access a directory of NSW youth services.

Youth Solutions provides services for young people 12 to 25 years of age and the community including prevention and health promotion, drug and alcohol education, community programs and information and referral. Visit www.youthsolutions.com.au or call (02) 4628 2319 [provides services to young people in Macarthur & Wingecarribee].

NSW Health aims to reduce drug-related harm for individuals and the community by providing the facts, including the possible health, social and economic consequences of using alcohol and other drugs.

A range of drug and alcohol fact sheets is available for download at: www.yourroom.health.nsw.gov.au