

Cocaine Addiction

Cocaine is a white powder that comes from drying the leaves of the coca plant. Slang names for cocaine are coke, snow, blow, girl, toot, nose candy, and flake. Cocaine can be inhaled through the nose, taken by mouth, injected, or smoked. **Crack** is the term for cocaine that has been made into small rocks or pellets that can be smoked in a pipe.

Cocaine is a stimulant that makes users feel “high,” euphoric, energetic, and mentally alert after taking the drug. Cocaine is a highly addictive drug that can cause severe mental and physical problems. It is possible to overdose and die by using cocaine even once.

The January 2, 2002, issue of JAMA contains an article reporting that the use of acupuncture was no more successful in treating cocaine addiction than control treatment conditions.

IMMEDIATE EFFECTS OF TAKING COCAINE

- Fast heartbeat and breathing and increases in blood pressure and body temperature occur after using a small amount of cocaine.
- Large amounts (more than 100 milligrams) can cause bizarre, erratic, or violent behavior.
- Physical symptoms may include blurred vision, chest pain, nausea, fever, muscle spasms, convulsions and death from convulsions, coma, heart failure, or brain failure that causes breathing to stop.

LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF COCAINE USE

Psychological Effects

- **Dependence** can result from cocaine use, causing depression when the user is not high on the drug.
- After repeated uses, the cocaine high may be replaced by feelings of restlessness, anxiety, irritability, mood swings, paranoia, sleeplessness, and weight loss.
- Cocaine can cause emotional problems, problems at school and work, and isolation from family and friends.
- Cocaine can cause psychiatric problems such as psychosis, paranoia, depression, anxiety disorders, and delusions.

Physical Effects

- Repeated snorting of cocaine can cause damage and holes on the inside of the nose and runny, inflamed nasal passages.
- People who inject the drug are at increased risk of getting hepatitis and HIV, the virus that causes AIDS.
- People who smoke cocaine are more prone to severe respiratory infections.
- Cocaine use of all types has been linked to heart attacks, chest pain, respiratory failure, strokes, and abdominal pain and nausea.

TREATMENT FOR COCAINE ADDICTION

There are no drugs to treat cocaine addiction, although researchers are currently testing such drugs. Because of mood swings that may occur when cocaine is discontinued, antidepressants are sometimes helpful. Cognitive-behavioral therapy is the most commonly used treatment and involves learning new coping skills to avoid using cocaine and to develop skills in managing stress and other problems.

There are many inpatient and outpatient treatment centers for cocaine addiction. If you or someone you care about is using cocaine, get help immediately.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
www.samhsa.gov

To locate a treatment facility near you:
www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov

- National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information
800/729-6686
www.health.org
- National Institute on Drug Abuse
301/443-1124
www.nida.nih.gov
- Cocaine Anonymous World Services
310/559-5833
www.ca.org

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To find this and previous JAMA Patient Pages, go to the Patient Page Index on JAMA's Web site at www.jama.com. A Patient Page on drug abuse was published in the March 8, 2000, issue.

Sources: Addiction Research Foundation, American Council for Drug Education, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Cocaine Anonymous World Services, National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information, National Institute on Drug Abuse, Nemours Foundation, US Department of Health and Human Services (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration)

