

Cocaine

What is cocaine?

Cocaine is a very addictive drug made from the leaves of the coca plant. It affects the brain's chemical nerves. Cocaine users feel more energy and are more alert. There is an elevated or euphoric mood.

How is cocaine used?

Cocaine can be either a white powder that is snorted or dissolved in water and injected. Crack cocaine is a form of freebase cocaine that can be smoked. The effect of snorting cocaine lasts about 30 minutes. Smoking crack or injecting cocaine produces a quicker and more intense effect and lasts about 10 minutes. Cocaine is often repeatedly used in short periods called "binging". After using cocaine repeatedly tolerance builds. The user will need higher amounts to attain the same effect. There is no "safe" cocaine use.

How does cocaine affect health?

There can be short- and long-term effects on your health.

- **Heart:** Cocaine increases your heart rate and blood pressure. It constricts the arteries that supply blood to the heart. It can also trigger an abnormal heart rhythm. Heart attack risk increases with cocaine use.
- **Lungs:** Snorting cocaine damages the nose and sinuses. This leads to loss of smell, nosebleeds and problems swallowing. Smoking crack cocaine irritates the lungs and can lead to infection.

- **Brain:** Cocaine can block the blood supply to the brain. It causes loss of brain function or stroke. Cocaine can also lead to seizures.
- **Mood:** Cocaine use makes people feel restless. It may produce panic attacks and paranoia as well.

What can I expect with cocaine withdrawal?

The initial "crash" of cocaine withdrawal can happen within hours of last using it. Withdrawal symptoms may last up to several days. The most common symptom is a strong craving to use cocaine again. Mood changes are common. It includes feelings of depression, anxiety and/or irritability. Many people feel very tired yet have trouble sleeping. They may also have vivid and unpleasant dreams. Some people feel achy and chilled. Your doctor may prescribe medicines to help ease symptoms for a few days.

Once you decide to quit, now what?

Congratulations! It can be a hard decision to quit. There is help and you don't have to do it alone. Counseling has proved to be very effective in helping people quit.

On-line Services:

Counseling services in your area:

www.samhsa.gov/treatment/index.aspx

Self-help groups: Cocaine Anonymous - <http://www.ca.org/>

For more general information or to take a self-quiz about addiction: www.ncadd.org/

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright ©7/2019. University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#7546.