

ASSIST

DRUG INFORMATION CARD

COCAINE

Street names

Coke, Charlie, blow, snow, powder, nose candy, white dust, rock, marching powder, crack (freebase cocaine).

What is it?

Cocaine is a stimulant drug with local anaesthetic qualities. It is derived from the processed leaves of the coca plant which is grown in South America. The most common form available in Australia is cocaine hydrochloride. Crack cocaine is a particularly pure form of cocaine (which has the hydrochloride removed) making it suitable for smoking. Crack cocaine is rarely found in Australia.

What does it look like?

Fine white powder or lumps (crystal rocks) as in crack cocaine.

How is it usually taken?

Most people who use cocaine – snort it. However, it can also be swallowed, injected, smoked or rubbed on to the gums.

Immediate effects

Within minutes of snorting cocaine people begin to feel its effects which can last up to an hour. Depending on how much is used and how pure the cocaine is, people may experience the following:

- A sense of euphoria and wellbeing
- Increased blood pressure, heart rate and body temperature
- Increased alertness, energy and self confidence
- Sexual arousal
- Loss of appetite
- Headaches and dizziness

In high doses people can experience cocaine toxicity (overdose) consisting of nausea, vomiting, heart palpitations, chest pain, tremors, increased body temperature and heart rate, which can lead to seizures, convulsions, heart attacks and strokes.

Long-term effects

Frequent and long-term use of cocaine may result in the following:

- Dependence
- Sleeping problems – insomnia and exhaustion
- Nose bleeds, sinusitis, and damage to the nasal wall from snorting
- Loss of interest in sex and impotence
- Paranoia, depression, and anxiety
- Cocaine-induced psychosis (seeing and hearing things that are not real)

Mixing cocaine with other drugs

Many people who use cocaine often combine it with alcohol which forms a toxic metabolite in the liver called cocaethylene which is potentially dangerous to the heart.

Mixing cocaine with other stimulant drugs such as ecstasy and methamphetamines can also place significant risk on the heart and raise the chance of heart attacks, seizures and strokes.

Some people will also use cannabis, Valium, Xanax etc. to get to sleep after using cocaine. Mixing different drugs together is more likely to risk toxicity and overdose.

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Harm reduction advice

- Don't share any snorting equipment because of risks of blood borne viruses including hepatitis C
- Avoid using banknotes (they are dirty) instead use your own tube or straw or even roll up some glossy magazine paper
- Rinse your nostrils with water between snorts to reduce the risk of nasal damage
- Try to avoid mixing cocaine with alcohol to reduce the risk of cardiovascular toxicity
- Try to set limits on the amount of cocaine you will use each session – bigger doses aren't going to capture the first rush
- Avoid using cocaine regularly - if you are finding it hard to go out without cocaine it is probably time to take a break or seek help from a professional