



Cocaine

Crack/Bazooka/Blanche/Cake/Coke/Lady/Star dust

What is it?

Cocaine is a fine white or off-white powder that acts as a powerful stimulant. In its pure form, cocaine is extracted from the leaves of the coca plant. On the street, it can be diluted or "cut" with other substances to increase the quantity. Crack is cocaine that has been further processed with ammonia or sodium bicarbonate (baking soda) and looks like small flakes or rocks.

Prevalence rates for lifetime use of cocaine are typically between one and three per cent in developed countries, with higher rates in the United States and in the producer countries of South America.

How is it taken?

Cocaine is usually sniffed/snorted or injected, whereas crack is smoked.

How does it affect users?

Cocaine can make users feel exhilarated and euphoric. Furthermore, users often experience a temporary increase in alertness and energy levels, and a postponement of hunger and fatigue.

What are the risks associated with cocaine use?

Short-term effects include faster breathing and increases in body temperature and heart rate. Users' behaviour can also become bizarre, erratic and violent.

Excessive doses of cocaine may lead to convulsions, seizures, stroke, cerebral haemorrhage or heart failure.

Long-term users of cocaine risk a number of health problems, some of them depending on the ingestion method. Sniffing cocaine severely damages nose tissue, smoking can cause respiratory problems, whilst injection can lead to abscesses and infectious diseases. Other risks, regardless of ingestion method, include dependency, malnutrition, weight loss, disorientation, apathy and a state similar to paranoid psychosis.

Other risks

Mixing cocaine with alcohol is a dangerous cocktail and can greatly increase the chances of sudden death. In fact, it is the most common two-drug mixture when sudden death occurs.

And as with any illicit drug, taking cocaine also clouds the user's judgment and increases the chance of him or her making bad choices, such as having unprotected sex and sharing needles. Thus, the user risks contracting HIV/AIDS, hepatitis and other infectious diseases.

