

A Look at Cocaine

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Cocaine's recent notoriety belies the fact that the drug has been used as a stimulant by people for thousands of years. Its properties as a stimulant have led people in the past to use it in a number of patent medicines and even in soft drinks.

But cocaine's highly addictive nature and addicts' willingness to pay a high price for the drug have propelled it into the public eye. The crime and violence associated with its transportation and sale, and the celebrity nature of some of its victims has kept cocaine in the news.

In its pure form, cocaine is a white crystalline powder extracted from the leaves of the South American coca plant. On the street, pure cocaine is diluted or "cut" with other substances to increase the quantity, and thereby increase the profits of its sellers.

Cocaine users most often inhale the powder sharply through the nose, where it is quickly absorbed into the bloodstream. But it also can be heated into a liquid and its fumes inhaled through a pipe in a method called "freebasing". Freebasing is also a common method of using a form of cocaine called "crack". Crack resembles small pieces of rock and is often called "rock" on the street.

Freebasing is an especially dangerous means of abusing cocaine because of the high concentrations of cocaine it introduces into the bloodstream. These high doses can overtax the cardiovascular system. Reports of sudden death while freebasing are not uncommon.

Cocaine is highly addictive, especially in the crack form. In studies, animals addicted to cocaine preferred the drug to food, even when it meant they would starve. Many users report being "hooked" after only one use. The addiction is both psychological and physical.

Symptoms

Users usually feel an initial "rush" or sense of well-being, of having more energy, and being more alert. This effect quickly wears off, often leaving the user feeling more "down" or depressed than before. This down feeling leads the addict to use more cocaine, sometimes just to feel "normal." Over a period of time the amount of cocaine needed and the frequency of use to achieve a "high" have to be increased. Feelings of depression can become chronic.

Cocaine addicts frequently turn to other drugs to relieve the down feeling when more cocaine is not available. When used together, these drugs and cocaine can prove even more deadly than when used alone.

Despite a popular myth, cocaine does not enhance performance whether it be on the job, in sports, at school, or with a sexual partner. On the contrary, long-term use can lead to loss of concentration, irritability, loss of memory, paranoia, loss of energy, anxiety, and a loss of interest in sex. The controlling effect cocaine has on an addict's life can lead to exclusion of all other facets of life. A habit can cost an addict thousands of dollars a week to maintain.

Breaking a cocaine habit is not easy. How long and how difficult a task it may be varies from person to person. Treatment can be

costly and the craving for cocaine may persist for long periods of time.

What Do I Do?

Cocaine use can be destructive physically, emotionally, relationally and financially. Often individual's are not willing to admit the destructive impact of the drug on their lives. The first step is to admit that there is problem and to acknowledge the inability of the individual to overcome it. The next step is to seek help.

It is important that the individual secure the effective help. Seeking out a mental health professional trained in drug addictions, contacting Narcotics Anonymous or another local support group can be of great assistance. Get help.

Want more information? Contact:

National Clearing House for Drug and Alcohol Information
P.O. Box 2345
Rockville, MD 20847-2345
800-729-6686

This information is presented for educational purposes only. It is not a substitute for informed medical advice or training. Do not use this information to diagnose or treat a mental health problem without consulting a qualified health or mental health care provider.

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HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOU WOULD BENEFIT FROM COUNSELING?

These conditions or situations are widely experienced and may indicate the need for professional counseling:

- Depression, discouragement
- Lack of motivation, apathy
- Anger, bitterness, resentment
- General dissatisfaction with life or relationships
- Difficulties in handling life events
- Marriage and family conflicts
- Sexual dysfunction
- Difficulties in decision making
- Physical ailments for which no medical cause can be found, such as headaches and lower back pain. (Medical consultation may be required in conjunction with therapy.)
- Difficulty in building and maintaining satisfying relationships
- Job stress, inability to keep jobs
- Inability to deal with a child's misbehavior or school problems
- Compulsive behaviors (eating disorders, spending, sexual issues)
- Issues related to low self-esteem or lack of self-worth
- Excessive dependence upon the approval or validation of others

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COCAINE



*Understanding
The
Hazards and Effects
Of
Cocaine*