

WHAT IS COCAIN

A powerful stimulant, cocaine is derived from the leaves of the South American coca shrub and ground into a crystalline powder. The most common methods of using the drug are either snorting it, liquifying it and then injecting it, or freebasing (smoking). When snorted, the white powder is sniffed up through the nose. The most potent and expensive method of cocaine use is freebasing. The drug is usually smoked in a water pipe because this provides faster absorption into the bloodstream.

Crack is relatively easy to make and fairly inexpensive to buy. At ten to fifteen dollars a dose, crack is the form of cocaine that is most prevalent on the streets. When snorted, crack reaches the brain in about five minutes. When injected or smoked, it takes only a few seconds for the drug to take effect.

Use of cocaine produces feelings of well-being, euphoria, and extreme exhilaration. Mental alertness seems to increase. Blood vessels constrict, causing heart rate and blood pressure to rise. Cocaine is rapidly metabolized by the liver. Snorting cocaine results in a five to fifteen minute "high," whereas the effects of crack last twenty to thirty minutes. Psychological and physical dependency on crack develop rapidly because of the brief period of stimulation. The feelings of exhilaration experienced while under the influence of the drug are quickly followed by depression.

The physical consequences of cocaine use are extreme and highly dangerous. Cocaine use can cause headaches, exhaustion, shaking, blurred vision, nausea, impaired judgment, hyperactivity, loss of appetite, loss of sexual desire, and paranoia that can lead to violence. Snorting cocaine can destroy the septum in the nose. Freebasing may damage the liver and the lungs; fluid buildup in the lungs has resulted in death for some individuals who freebase. Cocaine can initiate strokes, bleeding in the brain, heart attacks, irregular heartbeat, and sudden death.

Women who use cocaine while pregnant have newborns that suffer withdrawal from the drug and permanent disability. Fluctuations in the mother's blood pressure can deprive the baby's brain of oxygen, causing the blood vessels in the baby's brain to break down. Essentially the baby suffers the equivalent of a stroke. Babies born to cocaine addicts have more respiratory, kidney, and visual problems; lack coordination; and are developmentally retarded. Paternal cocaine use may result in the sperm carrying cocaine to the ovum, thus providing early cocaine exposure to the developing embryo. It seems unlikely that a significant amount of damage could result from the father's use of cocaine. However, rat studies indicate that exposure of the father to cocaine resulted in behavioral changes in baby rats sired by that father.

Cocaine addiction is extremely difficult to overcome. Antidepressants seem to help reduce dependency. Tyrosine and tryptopan have also been used for treatment. These chemicals are amino acids that seem to block a cocaine high when taken with an antidepressant.

References:

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