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Cocaine

Also called: Blow, Coca, Coke, Crack, Flake, Snow, Soda Cot

What is cocaine?

Cocaine is a very addictive drug that is made from leaves of the coca plant found in South America. It is mostly available as an illegal drug that some people use to get high. In rare cases, it is also used as a prescription drug for anesthesia during certain surgeries.

As a street (illegal) drug, cocaine is usually a fine, white, crystal powder. Street dealers sometimes mix it with cornstarch, talcum powder, or flour to make it look like they have more cocaine. That way they can make more money. They may also mix it with other illegal drugs. Another form of the drug is crack cocaine. Crack cocaine has been heated to make it into a rock crystal.

How do people use cocaine?

People snort cocaine powder through the nose or rub it into their gums. Others dissolve the powder and inject it into the bloodstream. Some people inject a combination of cocaine and heroin [<https://medlineplus.gov/heroin.html>] , called a "speedball." Crack cocaine is smoked.

What are the short-term effects of cocaine?

Cocaine is a stimulant that can make people feel like they have more energy and are extra alert. But it can also make people feel restless, irritable, anxious, and paranoid. Large amounts of cocaine can lead to bizarre, unpredictable, and violent behavior.

Cocaine's effects appear almost immediately and disappear within a few minutes to an hour. How long the effects last and how intense they are will depend on how the person used it.

In some cases, cocaine can cause very serious health problems such as a heart attack [<https://medlineplus.gov/heartattack.html>] , stroke [<https://medlineplus.gov/stroke.html>] , or coma [<https://medlineplus.gov/coma.html>] .

What are the long-term effects of cocaine?

People who use cocaine over the long term may develop health problems. Which problems they have will depend on how they used the cocaine:

- Snorting it can lead to a loss of sense of smell [<https://medlineplus.gov/tasteandsmeleldisorders.html>] , nosebleeds, nasal damage, and trouble swallowing [<https://medlineplus.gov/swallowingdisorders.html>] .
- Smoking it can cause a cough [<https://medlineplus.gov/cough.html>] , asthma [<https://medlineplus.gov/asthma.html>] , trouble breathing [<https://medlineplus.gov/breathingproblems.html>] , and a higher risk of infections like pneumonia [<https://medlineplus.gov/pneumonia.html>] .
- Injecting it with a needle can lead to skin [<https://medlineplus.gov/skininfections.html>] or soft tissue infections, as well as scarring [<https://medlineplus.gov/scars.html>] . It can cause collapsed veins. When a vein collapses, the blood cannot flow through it. Injecting cocaine also puts a person at higher risk of getting diseases such as HIV [<https://medlineplus.gov/hiv.html>] and hepatitis C [<https://medlineplus.gov/hepatitisc.html>] .

Other long-term effects of cocaine use may include malnutrition [<https://medlineplus.gov/malnutrition.html>] and movement disorders [<https://medlineplus.gov/movementdisorders.html>] , including Parkinson's disease [<https://medlineplus.gov/parkinsonsdisease.html>] .

Repeated use of cocaine can lead to tolerance. This means users need more and more of the drug to have the same effect. At higher doses over time, the body becomes dependent on cocaine. If someone who is dependent on cocaine stops using it, they will have withdrawal symptoms. These symptoms can include:

- Depression [<https://medlineplus.gov/depression.html>]
- Restlessness
- Fatigue [<https://medlineplus.gov/fatigue.html>]
- Increased appetite
- Bad dreams and insomnia [<https://medlineplus.gov/insomnia.html>]
- Slowed thinking

Repeated use of cocaine can also lead to cocaine use disorder, also called addiction. This is more than physical dependence. It's a chronic (long-lasting) brain disorder. When someone has it, they continue to use cocaine even though it causes problems in their life. Some examples include health problems and not being able to meet responsibilities at work, school, or home. Getting and using cocaine becomes their main purpose in life.

Can a person overdose on cocaine?

It's possible to overdose on cocaine. This happens when a person uses so much cocaine that it causes a life-threatening reaction or death. Some people use cocaine along with other drugs or alcohol. This can increase the risk of an overdose.

A cocaine overdose can cause health problems such as:

- Stroke
- Seizures [<https://medlineplus.gov/seizures.html>]
- irregular heartbeat [<https://medlineplus.gov/arrhythmia.html>] (arrhythmia)
- Heart attack

There is no specific medicine to treat an overdose. Health care providers will focus on treating the specific health problems caused by the overdose.

What are the treatments for cocaine use disorder?

The treatments for cocaine use disorder are different types of behavioral therapies. There are no medicines which can treat it.

NIH: National Institute on Drug Abuse

Diagnosis and Tests

- Drug Testing [<https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/drug-testing/>]  (National Library of Medicine)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/pruebas-de-laboratorio/pruebas-de-drogas/>]
- Drug Use Screening Tests [<https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/drug-use-screening-tests/>]  (National Library of Medicine)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/pruebas-de-laboratorio/pruebas-de-deteccion-del-uso-de-drogas/>]

Treatments and Therapies

- What Is Substance Abuse Treatment? A Booklet for Families [<https://library.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/sma14-4126.pdf>]
(Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration) - **PDF**

Related Issues

- Cocaine and Pregnancy [<https://www.marchofdimes.org/find-support/topics/pregnancy/cocaine-and-pregnancy>] (March of Dimes Foundation)

Images

- Cocaine [<https://www.dea.gov/galleries/drug-images/cocaine>] (Drug Enforcement Administration)

Statistics and Research

- Cocaine [<https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/cocaine>]  (National Institute on Drug Abuse)

Clinical Trials

- ClinicalTrials.gov: Cocaine-Related Disorders [<https://clinicaltrials.gov/search?cond=%22Cocaine-Related+Disorders%22&aggFilters=status:not%20rec>]  (National Institutes of Health)
- ClinicalTrials.gov: Crack Cocaine [<https://clinicaltrials.gov/search?cond=%22Crack+Cocaine%22&aggFilters=status:not%20rec>]  (National Institutes of Health)

Journal Articles

References and abstracts from MEDLINE/PubMed (National Library of Medicine)

- Article: Trends in cocaine use and cocaine-related harms in Ireland: a retrospective,... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40604652>]
- Article: Distinct cardiac troponin alterations in patients with cocaine and alcohol use... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40594766>]
- Article: Characteristics, crack use, housing situation and psychosocial problems of people in... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40474185>]
- Cocaine -- see more articles [<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/?term=%22Cocaine+Smoking%22%5Bmajr%3Anoexp%5D+OR+%22Cocaine-Related+Disorders%22%5Bmajr%3Anoexp%5D+AND+humans%5Bmh%5D+AND+english%5Bla%5D+AND+%22last+1+Year%22+%5Bdat%5D+NOT+%28letter%5Bpt%5D+OR+case+reports%5Bpt%5D+OR+editorial%5Bpt%5D+OR+comment%5Bpt%5D%29+AND+free+full+text%5Bsb%5D+>]

Find an Expert

- Drug Enforcement Administration [<https://www.dea.gov/>]
- FindTreatment.gov [<https://findtreatment.gov/>] (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration)
Also in Spanish [<https://findtreatment.gov/es>]
- National Institute on Drug Abuse [<https://nida.nih.gov/>] 
Also in Spanish [<https://nida.nih.gov/es>]
- Partnership to End Addiction [<https://drugfree.org/>]

Teenagers

- Mind Matters: The Body's Response to Cocaine [<https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/parents-educators/mind-matter-series/cocaine>]  (National Institute on Drug Abuse)
Also in Spanish [<https://nida.nih.gov/es/research-topics/parents-educators/mind-matter-series/cocaina>]
- What Are Cocaine and Crack? [<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/drugs-cocaine.html>] (Nemours Foundation)
Also in Spanish [<https://kidshealth.org/es/parents/drugs-cocaine.html>]

Women

- Cocaine and Pregnancy [<https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/cocaine-pregnancy/>]
(Organization of Teratology Information Specialists)
Also in Spanish [<https://mothertobaby.org/es/hojas-informativas/la-cocaina/>]

Patient Handouts

- Cocaine withdrawal [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000947.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/000947.htm>]
- Substance use -- cocaine [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000793.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/patientinstructions/000793.htm>]



MEDICAL ENCYCLOPEDIA

- Cocaine intoxication [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000946.htm>]
- Cocaine withdrawal [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000947.htm>]
- Substance use -- cocaine [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/patientinstructions/000793.htm>]

Related Health Topics

- Drug Use and Addiction [<https://medlineplus.gov/druguseandaddiction.html>]

National Institutes of Health

The primary NIH organization for research on *Cocaine* is the National Institute on Drug Abuse [<https://www.drugabuse.gov/>]

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