

COCAINE / CRACK

PERSONAL HEALTH FACT SHEET

What is Cocaine? Crack?

Cocaine is a powerful central nervous system stimulant. It is a white powder that is water soluble and often mixed with various substances. Cocaine is usually snorted or dissolved in water and injected into the veins of the user. A form of cocaine called "freebase" can be smoked.

Crack is a potent form of the drug that is usually smoked, and it is highly addictive. Crack cocaine is usually sold in the form of rocks or chunks that are odorless and usually off-white in color. Crack is usually sold at a lower cost per dose than pure cocaine.

Street names for various forms of the drug include coke, blow, nose candy, snowball, tornado, and wicky stick.

Can people become dependent on cocaine?

Cocaine causes a strong craving for further use, and physical and psychological dependence occur quickly. Tolerance is developed so that a user needs to use more of the drug to get the same effect. Withdrawal symptoms occur when people stop using cocaine. These include: exhaustion, irritability, sleepiness, loss of energy.

Signs of acute toxicity are: nervousness, dizziness, blurred vision, tremors. An overdose can lead to convulsions, heart irregularities and respiratory arrest. Chronic use can lead to perforation/ulceration of the nasal septum, weight loss, insomnia, anxiety, paranoia, and hallucinations.

What are the risks of cocaine use by the pregnant woman to an unborn child?

Cocaine or crack taken by the mother may have profound effects on the fetus. Women are at greater risk of miscarriages. Babies born to cocaine mothers are often premature or low birth weight. They frequently suffer from tremors and are less responsive than other newborns.

PHYSICAL RISKS

- increase in blood pressure, heart rate, breathing rate, and body temperature
- heart attack, stroke, respiratory failure and sudden death
- hepatitis or AIDS through shared needles
- brain seizures
- reduction of body's ability to resist and combat infection

PSYCHOLOGICAL RISKS

- violent behavior / irritability
- hallucinations and "coke" bugs
- a sensation of imaginary insects crawling over the skin
- confusion, anxiety, and depression
- loss of interest in food or sex
- cocaine-psychosis (losing touch with reality, loss of interest in friends, family, sports, hobbies, and other activities)

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