

Cocaine (Powder)

Profile

Cocaine is a highly addictive drug of abuse. It is categorized as a stimulant, and is currently a Schedule II substance. Stimulants heighten the body's activity, including increases in energy, alertness, heart rate, and blood pressure. The form of cocaine that is commonly used is a white powder obtained from the leaves of the Erythroxyton Coca plant.

History

Humans have known about the stimulant effects of the Coca plant since ancient South American cultures chewed the leaves in everyday activities and religious rituals. Cocaine first appeared in American society in the 1880's as a surgical anesthetic, and soon became a common household drug, as well as an ingredient in Coca-Cola and in several types of wines.¹ Snorting cocaine was slowly becoming popular in the early 1900's until the drug was banned in 1914 as a result of the Harrison Act. Abuse began rising again in the 1960's, causing Congress to classify it as a Schedule II drug in 1970.² Later, in the mid-1980's, crack cocaine, which is derived from powder cocaine, became an enormously popular drug of abuse. Today, synthetic forms of cocaine such as Novocain are still used as local anesthetics for surgical purposes; however, medical use has become more sporadic with the introduction of safer and more improved pharmaceuticals.³ Illicit, recreational use of cocaine remains popular today.

Methods of Use

The most common method of using powder cocaine is snorting – sniffing the powder into the nasal passages. It can also be injected intravenously, ingested orally, or even rubbed on the user's gums. Powdered cocaine can also be smoked, as users occasionally sprinkle it on cigarettes or 'joints'. The drug can also be smoked as crack cocaine or 'freebase' after the powder has been processed into a rock form. Because smoking a substance allows it to reach the brain more quickly than other methods, smoking crack or freebase creates an intense and immediate high (in about 10 to 15 seconds), making the drug even more addictive.⁴

Cocaine's Effects on the Brain

Cocaine is a strong central nervous stimulant that interferes with and causes excess amounts of dopamine in the brain. Dopamine, a neurotransmitter related to pleasure and movement, is primarily associated with the brain's reward system. Cocaine is especially addictive because it alters the brain's sense of reward and punishment. A buildup of dopamine causes constant stimulation of the brain's sense of reward until the effects of

the drug wear off. This explains why users may experience feelings of euphoria while under the influence of cocaine and why they may crave the drug after the effects have worn off.⁵

Short-Term Effects

The immediate, intense cocaine high lasts about 15 to 30 minutes when snorting while effects from smoking last approximately 5 to 10 minutes; residual effects can continue for 1 to 2 hours, however. These effects include:⁶

- Constricted blood vessels
- Dilated pupils
- Increased temperature, heart rate, and blood pressure
- Stress on the heart and circulatory system
- Increased energy and alertness; hyperstimulation
- Euphoria
- Decreased appetite
- Impotence
- Restlessness and insomnia
- Irritability
- Anxiety and paranoia
- Increased possibility of risky behaviors that can lead to sexually transmitted illnesses or transmission of HIV or Hepatitis through shared needles

Long-Term Effects

Prolonged cocaine abuse can cause a number of other problems including:⁷

- Headaches
- Convulsions and seizures
- Heart disease and heart attack
- Stroke
- Lung damage and disease (respiratory failure and difficulty breathing)
- Damage to the nasal septum (when snorting)
- Irritability and mood disturbances
- Auditory and tactile hallucinations (“coke bugs”)
- Sexual dysfunction in both males and females
- Reproductive damage and infertility
- Sudden death – even one use can cause overdose or death

Addiction and Withdrawal

Cocaine is a highly addictive substance, and users can quickly develop a tolerance to the drug, needing more of the substance to achieve the desired effects. Also, when use of the

drug is stopped, withdrawal symptoms occur. These symptoms will be more severe the more heavily someone has been using cocaine. Users may continue using cocaine simply to relieve these effects of withdrawal. Symptoms can include depression, irritability, extreme fatigue, anxiety, and an intense craving for the drug.

Terminology

- Slang Terms for Powder Cocaine:
Coke, Snow, Snow White, Rock, Powder, Blow, Flake, Charlie, Yeyo (Spanish), Nose Candy, Johnny, Sugar, Toot, Happy Trails
- Common Quantity-Related Terms:
Bump – a small amount of cocaine for a quick rush
Line – a line of powdered cocaine prepared for inhaling, usually 2-4 inches long
Eightball ('Ball') – 1/8 ounce (3.5 grams)
Kilo ('Brick') – 1 kilogram (2.2 lbs)
- Use and Users:
Speedballing / Snowballing – using cocaine and heroin together
Chronic – marijuana laced with cocaine or crack
Dusting – sprinkling cocaine powder on other smokable drugs or on cigarettes
Snowcapping – Cocaine sprinkled over marijuana bong hits
Cokehead – heavy cocaine user
- Effects of Powder Cocaine Use
"The Drip" – the taste/sensation in the back of the throat after cocaine is sniffed
Coke Bugs – tactile hallucination after using cocaine that creates the illusion of bugs burrowing under the skin

Links

- [NIDA: Cocaine](#)
- [NIDA InfoFacts: Cocaine/Crack](#)
- [ONDCP: Cocaine](#)
- [ONDCP Cocaine Street Terms](#)
- [In The Know Zone: Cocaine](#)

¹ In The Know Zone. History of Cocaine and Crack Use. Retrieved October 27, 2006, from <http://www.intheknowzone.com/cocaine/history.htm>.

² ONDCP Cocaine Page. Retrieved October 27, 2006, from <http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/drugfact/cocaine/index.html>.

³ DEA Cocaine Brief. Retrieved October 27, 2006, from <http://www.dea.gov/concern/cocaine.html>.

⁴ NIDA Cocaine InfoFacts. <http://www.nida.nih.gov/Infofacts/cocaine.html>.

⁵ NIDA Research Report Series: Cocaine Abuse and Addiction. Retrieved October 27, 2006, from <http://www.drugabuse.gov/PDF/RRCocain.pdf>.

⁶ In The Know Zone. Short-Term Effects of Cocaine Use. Retrieved October 27, 2006, from <http://www.intheknowzone.com/cocaine/sterm.htm>.

⁷ In The Know Zone. Long-Term Effects of Cocaine Use. Retrieved October 27, 2006, from <http://www.intheknowzone.com/cocaine/lterm.htm>