

# **Crack Cocaine**

## **Profile**

“Crack” is the name given to cocaine that has been processed with baking soda or ammonia, and transformed into a more potent, smokable, “rock” form. The name refers to the crackling sound heard when the rock is heated and smoked. Cocaine is a stimulant that has been abused for ages; however, crack cocaine is the most potent form in which the drug has ever appeared. There is great risk when using any form of cocaine, but crack cocaine is the riskiest form of the substance. Smoking a substance allows it to reach the brain more quickly than other routes of administration, and compulsive cocaine use will develop even more rapidly if the substance is smoked rather than snorted. Smoking crack cocaine brings an intense and immediate but very short-lived high that lasts about fifteen minutes.<sup>1</sup> A person can become addicted after his or her first time trying crack cocaine.

## **History**

Crack cocaine was first developed during the cocaine boom of the 1970’s, and its use became enormously popular in the mid-1980s, particularly in urban areas.<sup>2</sup> Today it remains a very problematic and popular drug, as it is inexpensive to produce, and is much cheaper to purchase than powder cocaine.

## **Methods of Use**

Crack cocaine, once processed from cocaine powder, appears as a yellowish-white rock. It is cut or broken into smaller rocks weighing a few tenths of a gram. Crack cocaine is generally smoked through a glass handpipe or waterpipe. Also, there have been reports of the drug being injected intravenously or even snorted, but these methods are less common. In many areas of the country, users report combining crack cocaine with heroin, marijuana, and other types of drugs in order to create different, more intense effects.<sup>3</sup>

## **Crack Cocaine’s Effects on the Brain**

Crack cocaine is a strong central nervous stimulant that interferes with, and causes excess amounts of, dopamine in the brain. A neurotransmitter associated with pleasure and movement, dopamine is the neurotransmitter released as part of the brain’s reward system. As a result, the psychological effects can be extremely reinforcing; after having tried crack cocaine, the user will rapidly develop an intense craving for the drug since the chemistry of the brain’s reward system has been altered.

## **Short-Term Effects**

The high from crack cocaine begins almost immediately after the vapors are inhaled and lasts about 5 to 15 minutes. After the initial 'rush' subsides, the user experiences an intense desire for more of the drug – this is how users can become addicted after just their first hit. Other short-term effects include:<sup>4</sup>

- Increased blood pressure and heart rate
- Constricted peripheral blood vessels
- Increased rate of breathing
- Dilated pupils
- Hyper-stimulation
- Intense euphoria
- Decreased appetite
- Anxiety and paranoia
- Aggressive, paranoid behavior
- Depression
- Intense drug craving
- Sudden death – even one use can cause overdose or death

It is important to note that with any drug, effects may vary greatly due to the uncertainty of the drug's content.

## **Long-Term Effects**

Prolonged crack cocaine abuse causes a number of problems, including:<sup>5</sup>

- Severe depression
- Irritability and mood disturbances
- Aggressive, paranoid behavior
- Delirium or psychosis
- Tolerance and addiction, even after just one use
- Auditory and tactile hallucinations
- Heart attack and heart disease
- Stroke
- Respiratory failure
- Brain seizures
- Sexual dysfunction (for both men and women)
- Reproductive damage and infertility (for both men and women)
- Increased frequency of risky behavior
- Death

## Addiction and Withdrawal

Cocaine is a highly addictive substance, and crack cocaine is substantially more addicting, as the drug is far more potent and is smoked.<sup>6</sup> Users quickly develop a tolerance to crack cocaine, needing more of the substance to achieve the desired effects. Because the high from crack cocaine is so short-lived, users commonly smoke it repeatedly in order to sustain the high. This can lead to an even faster onset of addiction. Also, because crack cocaine works on the brain's system of reward and punishment, withdrawal symptoms occur when the drug's effects wear off. These symptoms can include depression, irritability, extreme fatigue, anxiety, an intense craving for the drug, and sometimes even psychosis. Users will often keep using crack cocaine simply to avoid the negative effects of withdrawal.

## Terminology

- Slang Terms for Crack Cocaine:
  - Rock, Hard Rock, Base, Kryptonite, Sugar Block, Topo (Spanish), Apple Jacks
- Use and Users:
  - Crackhead – heavy crack user
  - Crack house – place where crack is used or sold
  - Crack spot – place where crack is sold
  - Crackpipe – Pipe used to smoke crack; usually made of glass
  - Crack baby – Child born to cocaine or crack-using mother, often with abnormalities
  - Speedballing – 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
- Effects of Crack Cocaine Use:
  - Coke Bugs – tactile hallucination after using cocaine that creates the illusion of bugs burrowing under the skin

## Links

- [NIDA: Cocaine](#)
- [NIDA InfoFacts: Crack and Cocaine](#)
- [ONDCP: Cocaine](#)
- [ONDCP: Crack](#)
- [ONDCP Crack Street Terms](#)
- [In The Know Zone: Cocaine](#)
- [DEA Drugs of Concern: Cocaine](#)

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<sup>1</sup> NIDA Cocaine and Crack InfoFacts. Retrieved October 27, 2006, from <http://www.nida.nih.gov/Infofacts/cocaine.html>.

<sup>2</sup> ONDCP Crack Overview. Retrieved October 27, 2006, from <http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/drugfact/crack/index.html>.

<sup>3</sup> ONDCP Crack Overview.

<sup>4</sup> In The Know Zone. Short-Term Effects of Cocaine Use. Retrieved October 27, 2006, from <http://www.intheknowzone.com/cocaine/sterm.htm>.

<sup>5</sup> In The Know Zone. Long-Term Effects of Cocaine Use. Retrieved October 27, 2006, from <http://www.intheknowzone.com/cocaine/sterm.htm>.

<sup>6</sup> NIDA Crack and Cocaine InfoFacts.