



# Cocaine (coke, charlie, snow, blow, toot)

Cocaine is a stimulant drug which is extracted from the leaves of the South American coca plant. It is imported as cocaine hydrochloride, in white powder form (technically it's a salt!) which has a numbing, bitter taste.

Cocaine has been described as a recreational drug and its use by the general population over 14 years is fairly low at 1.6%. Latest research shows that use of cocaine is increasing however, especially among the 20-29 year old age group<sup>1</sup>. Many people believe cocaine to be a 'clean' drug especially when compared to speed. In reality it has been processed with caustic substances and is very likely to have been 'cut' with other substances (e.g. glucose, lactose, baking soda and talcum powder) in much the same way as speed.

## How is it used?

The majority of users 'snort' or sniff cocaine powder although it can be eaten or rubbed into the gums where it is absorbed into the bloodstream. It can also be injected and approximately 8% of regular users in Australia use this method.

### Immediate effects:

- Euphoria, wellbeing
- Increased self confidence
- Increased alertness and energy
- Increased heart rate, blood pressure, body temperature
- Decrease in need for sleep
- Reduction of appetite

### Long term effects:

- Sleep disorders
- Depression, anxiety
- Psychosis –paranoid delusions, hallucinations
- Facial tics and muscle twitching
- Nose complaints (runny nose, nose bleeds, sinusitis, perforation of the septum, nasal ulcers)
- Increased pulse rate
- Psychosis – hallucinations and paranoia
- Heart attacks, strokes and respiratory failure
- Relationship, financial, work, legal problems

## Re Balance Your Lifestyle

### **Cocaine overdose**

The effects of any drug depends on many factors such as what it is 'cut' with, the physical characteristics (gender, height, weight) of the person, how often the drug is used and how much is taken. In large quantities, a person can have a toxic reaction or overdose on cocaine as the strength and mix of street cocaine is unknown. An overdose can result in increased heart rate and body temperature, seizures, heart attack, brain hemorrhage, kidney failure, stroke and repeated convulsions - all which can lead to coma and death.

### **Risk of hepatitis C**

Snorting cocaine can damage the nose (especially the septum) and can lead to nose bleeds and tearing of the nasal wall. Hepatitis C is a blood borne virus and there is a small risk of transmission if you are sharing notes, straws or other equipment (which may have traces of blood) used to snort drugs.

### **Mixing with other drugs**

If you use stimulant drugs such as cocaine there is a risk that you may drink more alcohol than you normally would. Cocaine can have a cancelling out effect with alcohol and people report they don't feel drunk in this situation, however the harmful effects on the body are still at work. Combining cocaine with alcohol causes massive dehydration and increases the chances of overheating. Mixing with other stimulant drugs such as ecstasy and methamphetamine dramatically increases the potential for drug related toxicity and overdose.

### **Cocaine and driving**

Driving under the influence of cocaine is dangerous as your judgment is impaired – you may take extra risks due to the 'pumped up feelings' experienced. Reaction times may also be impaired when coming down from cocaine use. If used with alcohol, people have made the mistake of driving because the stimulating effects of the cocaine have cancelled out the effects of alcohol. Although they may feel 'OK' to drive, their Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC) levels are still elevated and their driving skills are impaired and the risk of accident is further increased.

It is important to remember that the best way to avoid harm from drugs is not to use at all.

### **Useful Links**

National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre [www.ndarc.med.unsw.edu.au](http://www.ndarc.med.unsw.edu.au)

Australian Drug Foundation [www.adf.org.au](http://www.adf.org.au)

Keep It Simple [www.kis.org.au](http://www.kis.org.au)

## Re Balance Your Lifestyle

RTA Road drug test factsheet [www.rta.nsw.gov.au](http://www.rta.nsw.gov.au)

<http://ols2.rta.nsw.gov.au/ebus/docs/rescat/pdf/1/637/45094006roaddrgtest10-08.pdf>

NDARC Cocaine Factsheet

ADF Ice (crystal methamphetamine) How Drugs Affect You [14]

NCETA (2004) Alcohol and Other Drugs: A Handbook for Health Professionals.

1 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2008. 2007 National Drug Strategy Household Survey: detailed findings. Drug statistics series no. 22. Cat. no. PHE 107. Canberra: AIHW.