

Substance Use, Abuse and Dependence

Classification and Information on Substances

Cocaine and Crack

DESCRIPTION	Cocaine, extracted from the leaves of the coca plant, is found in the form of a white, crystalline powder. Crack is a form of freebase cocaine and found as an off-white chip, rock or chunk.
MODE OF ADMINISTRATION	Cocaine is most frequently inhaled intra-nasally by snorting it. It is less frequently administered orally (by rubbing on gums), anally (by inserting into the anus), genitally (by inserting or rubbing onto the genitals), and even less frequently, intravenously (by injecting it). Crack cocaine is most frequently inhaled by smoking it.
PRIMARY EFFECT	Central nervous system stimulant
SHORT-TERM EFFECTS	<p>The effects of cocaine use are experienced almost immediately and last for a relatively brief time (30 to 60 minutes); thus repeated doses are required. Crack causes the same effects as powder cocaine, but the onset is more rapid and the intensity is greater. The following effects are usually present:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in heart rate and blood pressure; • Dilated pupils; • Decrease in appetite; • Increase in feeling alert, euphoric, energetic, confident, impulsive and even more powerful; • Increase in sexual arousal and sexual risk-taking; • In large doses, delusions, paranoia, psychosis, agitation, violence, seizures, heart attack and strokes can occur. • Sudden death in some cases; • When “high” wears off, feelings of irritability, tiredness, depression, paranoia and anxiety may develop (withdrawal much more intense after use of crack).
LONG-TERM EFFECTS	<p>Heavy and continued use can lead to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in irritability, impaired ability to concentrate, compulsive behaviours, severe insomnia, and weight loss; • Persistent nasal congestion (“Columbian Flu”)and perforated nasal septum (in the case of cocaine powder); • Immune system impairment; • Cardiovascular problems (including irregular heartbeat, heart attack and heart failure); • Neurological incidents (including strokes, seizures and hemorrhaging); • Pulmonary effects (including fluid in the lungs, aggravation of asthma and other lung disorders, and respiratory failure – especially in the case of smoking crack); • Gastrointestinal complaints (including diarrhea); • Psychiatric complications (including depression, insomnia, anxiety, sexual dysfunction, delusions, paranoia and psychosis); • Risk of injury (resulting from accidents and aggressive, violent or criminal behaviour); • Sudden death.
ADDICTION POTENTIAL	High psychological and physical addiction potential.
TREATMENT OPTIONS	In cases of heavy and prolonged use, inpatient and/or outpatient treatment with the use of multiple therapeutic methods (individual, family and group psychotherapy) is usually necessary to achieve lasting abstinence. Co-morbid conditions are treated if required.