

# THE BASICS

## Cocaine & Crack

### ***Do you know?***

- Cocaine and crack are powerful stimulants (drugs that increase energy and alertness).
- Cocaine and crack are sometimes confused as two different drugs when in fact they are the same drug in different forms.
- Cocaine is also known as coke, snow, blow and other names. Crack can be called rock.
- Cocaine and crack come from the leaves of the coca bush.
- Cocaine is an odorless, white crystal powder. Crack is a rock-like form of cocaine made from cocaine powder, baking soda and/or ammonia.
- Cocaine can be smoked, snorted or injected. When snorted or injected, effects last 30 to 40 minutes. Crack is usually smoked, and its effects last about 10 to 15 minutes.

### ***Short-term Effects***

While using a person may experience:

- enlarged pupils, dry mouth, stuffy nose
- feelings of euphoria (pleasure, well-being, confidence and power)
- more energy, alertness, less of a need to eat and sleep
- increased heart rate, blood pressure and breathing

High doses may cause such effects as:

- anxiety, unpredictable or violent behaviour, hearing or seeing things that aren't really there, blurred vision, headache, chest pain, muscle spasms, nausea and fever

Single high doses have been known to:

- contribute to seizures or death from stroke, heart attack or breathing problems

### ***Long-term Effects***

After heavy use over a long period of time, a person may experience:

- chapped skin under the nose and damage inside the nose if snorted
- throat or lung irritations when smoked
- headaches
- problems experiencing pleasure without the drug
- sexual dysfunction in men (not able to have sexual intercourse)
- memory, attention and behaviour problems
- weight and appetite loss, eating disorders
- tooth decay
- weakened immune system (the body has a hard time fighting infections)
- seizures, heart problems or stroke
- intense depression (sadness), paranoia (feeling scared or suspicious for no reason) and hallucinations (hearing and seeing things that aren't really there)

### ***The Danger of Smoking Cocaine***

Users of cocaine will become addicted more quickly if they smoke it as opposed to snorting it. That's because when cocaine is smoked, very high doses of the drug get to the brain quickly, which gives the user an immediate and very intense high.

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## ***Tolerance and Dependence***

- Regular users of cocaine and crack can rapidly develop a powerful psychological dependence (they feel they need it) and a physical dependence (the body needs it).
- Tolerance (the need for more of the drug to get the desired effect) occurs in some people but not in others.

## ***Withdrawal Symptoms***

- These can include excessive sleep, depression, anxiety, hunger, irritability and intense cravings.

## ***Other Risks***

- Cocaine and crack are illegal substances. Legal problems can result from having, using, making or selling cocaine or crack.
- Cocaine and crack are expensive street drugs. Financial problems can result from using these drugs.
- Cocaine or crack use during pregnancy increases risks of:
  - the baby dying before the due date
  - premature birth with low birth weights
  - stroke and brain damage prior to birth
  - irritability, sleep and feeding problems
- Infants being breast fed by mothers using cocaine or crack can suffer seizures.
- People can put themselves in risky situations when on this drug (driving while impaired, having unprotected sex, taking unsafe actions which could cause injury).
- Sharing pipes or needles can lead to infections such as HIV and hepatitis.
- Cocaine or crack are often mixed or diluted with other substances, and some of them are poisonous.
- Dangerous or fatal allergic reactions can occur if the user is allergic.

## ***Mental Health***

- Substance use and mental health problems often can occur together.
- Substance use may increase the risk of mental health problems.
- People with mental health problems are at higher risk of developing substance abuse problems.
  - Sometimes they use alcohol and other drugs to give themselves a break from mental health symptoms.
  - For most people, though, alcohol and other substance use only covers up the symptoms and may make them worse.

**REMEMBER:** A person's experience with any drug can vary. Here are a few of the many things that may affect the experience: the amount and strength of the drug taken, the setting, a person's mood and expectations before taking the drug, gender, overall health, past experience with that drug and whether more than one drug is being used at the same time. Using alcohol and other drugs at the same time can be dangerous.

### ***Sources and For More Information***

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*Buzzed*, Duke University Medical Centre, 1998.

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*Drugs & Drug Abuse*, 3rd Ed, CAMH, 1998.

*Fast Facts on Drugs*, AFM, 2004.

*National Institute on Drug Abuse Website*: [www.nida.nih.gov](http://www.nida.nih.gov)

*Stimulants and Mental Health* (brochure), VIHA.

*Straight Facts about Drugs and Drug Abuse*, Health Canada, 2000.

*Street Drugs: A Drug Identification Guide*, Publishers Group, LLC, Plymouth, MN, 2005.

### ***For more information or for help with a drug or alcohol problem:***

Contact your local Addictions Foundation of Manitoba (AFM) office or visit the website at [www.afm.mb.ca](http://www.afm.mb.ca). AFM offers a broad range of prevention and rehabilitation services, including harm reduction and abstinence-based programs for alcohol, other drugs and gambling.

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