



Cocaine & Crack

What Is It?

Cocaine and crack cocaine (“crack”) are stimulant drugs made from coca leaves. They go by many other names such as: C, rock, snow, coke, blow, flake and freebase.

WARNING: Buyer Beware! *Cocaine and crack are illicit drugs. Always assume illicit drugs may contain a very dangerous mixture of potentially lethal synthetic (man-made) opioids like fentanyl and other additives.*

What Does It Look Like?

In its original form, cocaine looks like a white powder, though most cocaine currently being sold has been cut with many different substances, which may change its appearance.

Crack is a form of cocaine that has been further processed to make it a crystal that can be more easily smoked. Crack is a very strong form of cocaine.

How Does It Work?

Cocaine and crack are fast-acting stimulant drugs that speed up your heart rate and other systems in your body. Their effects begin within seconds to minutes of use. Cocaine changes brain chemistry so that people feel a sense of euphoria. Other effects include increased alertness and excitement, restlessness, irritability, anxiety, and paranoia. A crash follows the euphoria and can involve mental and physical exhaustion, sleep, depression, and a craving to use again. The high only lasts a short time and tolerance develops fast, so people are more likely to use a lot, quickly.

Why Is It Dangerous?

Cocaine and crack can have widespread effects on a person's life including physical, mental, and social harms.

Like other stimulants, cocaine and crack put a great deal of strain on your body and its organs. Even casual use can cause:

- Heart stress, cardiac problems, or heart attacks
- Seizures or strokes
- Hallucinations
- High blood pressure
- Irregular heartbeat
- Infection
- Organ damage
- Death



Snorting drugs like cocaine can also lead to nosebleeds, chronic sinus infections, nasal crusting, holes forming in the septum, and scar tissue in the nasal passages.

Smoking drugs like crack through a glass pipe can also spread diseases (HIV, Hepatitis, etc.), cause mouth sores, burns to the lips and mouth, damage to the mouth, throat, and lungs (including pneumonia, emphysema, and lung cancer), and hypoxia (lack of oxygen).

What Does Stimulant Toxicity Look Like?

Symptoms of stimulant toxicity include rigid jerking limbs (arms and legs), loss of consciousness, seizures, high temperature/sweating, rapid pulse, and chest pains – **this is a medical emergency! Call 9-1-1.**

- While waiting for the ambulance to arrive, stay with them for support and stay calm. The **Good Samaritan Drug Overdose Act** protects you from drug possession charges when helping in an overdose situation.
- **If in doubt, give Naloxone.** It will not reverse the effects of stimulant toxicity, but it can reverse the effects of opioids that can be in any illicit drugs. Naloxone will not cause further harm.
- If the heart stops, give the person CPR.
- If they are having a seizure, make sure there is nothing around them that can hurt them. Do not put anything in their mouth or restrain them.
- If they are conscious, follow the steps below for stimulant overamping.

Stimulant Overamping

Stimulant overamping is when someone takes too many stimulant drugs. It is specific to “overdosing” on stimulants like cocaine. If someone is conscious and experiencing “over-amping”, or mental distress because of stimulant use and/or sleep deprivation from stimulant use:

- Stay calm, stay with them, encourage them not to take any more substances, and move away from activity and noise.
- If they are thirsty, give them water or other non-sugary, non-caffeinated, non-alcoholic drinks to help replace lost electrolytes.
- Place a cool wet cloth on their forehead, back of neck, armpits.
- Watch for any changes.

Safer Use Tips

There is **no** safe way to use cocaine or crack. If you are using cocaine or crack, here are some tips to decrease your risk:

- **Start low and go slow.** Start with a “tester dose” and wait before taking more. Be aware that pausing or reducing use, even for a few days, can significantly lower tolerance – starting low and going slow can decrease the risk of a fatal overdose.



- **Don't use alone.** If you are using alone, call NORS -- the National Overdose Response Service Hotline, at 1-888-688-NORS (6677) so you can get help if you need it.
- **Don't mix with other substances**, including alcohol and prescription or over the counter medications.
- **Don't share equipment!** Sharing drug equipment like needles, pipes or spoons, increases risk of infection. Contaminated equipment can spread several serious diseases, such as HIV, hepatitis B, and hepatitis C.
- If smoking from a pipe, don't use steel wool or Brillo as a filter. Use brass screens instead.
- **Stay hydrated.** Drink water and use lip balm.
- **Know the signs of an opioid overdose and act!** Stay within cell range or have access to a satellite phone in case you need to call 9-1-1. **Always carry Naloxone with you and know how to use it.** Kits are available for free at locations across the NWT – **make sure your kit doesn't freeze!**
- **Take a photo of the drug** before you use it. If you end up getting sick, this can help keep other people safe and makes it easier to help you.

Need Help?

Reach out to your local health centre, community counsellor/mental health professional, or call 8-1-1.