

Did You Know?

Cocaine's short-lived effects can encourage repeated use.

Cocaine is a powerful stimulant. Its rewarding effects can be relatively brief, and some people take repeated doses to try to maintain them. That can increase exposure, reduce sleep and food intake, and raise physical and psychological risks.

Cocaine: Reward, Crash & Risk

Cravings - repeated use - heart risks - support

The reward-and-crash cycle

Cocaine increases dopamine signalling in brain reward pathways. After the stimulation and euphoria fade, a person may feel tired, low, anxious or irritable. Craving can then pull the cycle towards another dose.

Quick facts

STIMULANT

Can increase alertness, heart rate and blood pressure.

REPEATED USE

A short high can contribute to repeated dosing in one session.

MENTAL HEALTH

Anxiety, agitation and paranoia can occur.

DEPENDENCE

Craving and compulsive patterns can develop.

COCAINE + ALCOHOL

Using cocaine and alcohol together produces cocaethylene in the body and can increase cardiovascular toxicity. Mixing substances makes effects and risks less predictable.

The 'crash'

- Strong tiredness
- Low mood
- Irritability
- Anxiety
- Sleep changes
- Increased appetite
- Cravings
- Difficulty enjoying things

Withdrawal is often more psychological than medically dangerous, but severe depression, agitation or thoughts of self-harm need urgent support.

Heart & body

Cocaine places strain on the cardiovascular system. Serious complications can include abnormal heart rhythms, heart attack, stroke and seizures. Risk can occur even in people who do not use cocaine regularly.

Emergency signs

Chest pain, collapse, seizure, severe breathing difficulty, extreme overheating or severe confusion need emergency medical help. Call 999.

Notice the pattern

Risk is not defined only by how often someone uses cocaine. Losing control over the amount, repeatedly returning to it, spending more than intended, hiding use, or continuing despite harm can all be signs that support would be useful.

Support can help

Drug and alcohol services can offer confidential assessment, psychological support and help with cravings, triggers, relapse prevention and wider wellbeing.

Need support?

Speak to your GP or a local NHS/community drug and alcohol service. If someone has chest pain, collapses, has a seizure or becomes severely unwell after cocaine, call 999.

Sources: NHS cocaine guidance - FRANK - NICE drug misuse guidance | Space to Breathe Therapy