

What it looks like Cocaine is a white powder that usually comes in a paper or plastic wrap.

How it's taken It is usually divided into lines on a smooth surface and sniffed or snorted up the nose through a rolled-up banknote or a straw. It can also be dissolved and injected using needles and syringes.

What it does Cocaine is a stimulant. This means it raises body temperature, makes the heart beat faster and stops you feeling hungry.

Cocaine gives a false sense of confidence and makes users feel more sociable and alert. This might lead you to take risks you might not otherwise take.

Addiction When the effects start to wear off, there's a strong temptation to take more. People who get into this drug often find that they begin to crave it more and more. Cocaine can be very psychologically addictive. The user can suffer from withdrawal symptoms, which can include mental and emotional problems.

How long the effects last The hit from cocaine doesn't last long (20 to 30 minutes).

Risks

Dangers

Taking cocaine with alcohol or other drugs puts an extra strain on your liver and kidneys.

Injecting a mixture of cocaine and heroin, known as a 'speedball', is one of the most dangerous mixes you can use and could kill you.

You can die from a cocaine overdose. High doses can raise the body's temperature, cause convulsions and stop you breathing.

The risk of overdosing increases if cocaine is mixed with heroin, barbiturates or alcohol.

Physical effects

If you sniff too much cocaine, it can destroy your nasal passages.

People who use cocaine regularly often develop serious problems with anxiety and paranoia.

It's a known cause of panic attacks.

Using cocaine often can severely reduce your sex drive.

Injecting any drug can damage veins and cause ulcers and gangrene. Dirty or shared needles and other injecting equipment can spread HIV and hepatitis.

Taking cocaine when you're pregnant can damage your baby. Cocaine causes miscarriage, premature labour and smaller babies. It may also cause other abnormalities in babies at birth. Babies born to mothers who keep using cocaine throughout their pregnancy show severe withdrawal symptoms.

Cocaine is bad news for anybody with high blood pressure or a heart condition. Perfectly healthy, young people can have a fit or a heart attack after taking cocaine. You may not know you have a heart condition, but even if you don't you could still be in trouble.

What to do in an emergency

Don't delay – call 999 immediately.

If you think someone has overdosed on drugs, tell the operator what drugs they've taken (if you know).

What not to do

- Don't cause pain or another injury.
- Don't give them other drugs.
- Don't put them in a shower or bath.
- Don't walk them around.
- Don't leave them on their own.

Always follow the operator's instructions.

And remember, if you have any doubt always call 999. It could save the person's life.

What the law says

Cocaine is a classified drug. For the current classification and information about the consequences of using and supplying cocaine, go to www.knowthescore.info.

Fact: by law, passing drugs to someone else, including friends, is classed as supplying.

Fact: some countries may refuse visas to people who have drug convictions.

Getting more information

You can get more information by phoning the free and confidential 'Know the Score' information line on **0800 587 5879**. Someone is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Calls from landlines are free and will not show up on the phone bill. Or, you can visit the 'Know the Score' website www.knowthescore.info.

Both the information line and the website can provide information about local services. Also, you can ask your GP to refer you to a specialist drugs service. To find a drug service in your area visit www.scottishdrugservices.com.

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