

# COCAINE

## What is cocaine?

Cocaine is a stimulant which, in its pure form, is a white crystalline powder with a bitter, numbing taste. This powder is called cocaine hydrochloride and is made by processing and treating the leaves of the coca plant originally found in South America.

Cocaine is one of the most widely used illegal drugs in the USA and other parts of the world, however, it has never achieved the same level of use in this country. Recently, there has been an increase in availability of cocaine in Sydney, resulting in an increase in use by injecting drug users in that city.

Cocaine hydrochloride in powder form cannot be smoked effectively because the drug is destroyed at high temperatures. By removing the hydrochloride through a chemical process the drug is converted into 'freebase' which can then be smoked.

'Crack' is a form of freebase cocaine which is particularly pure. It is sold in the form of small lumps known as 'rocks'. There have been major problems with crack in the USA. However, it is rarely seen in Australia.

Street cocaine is usually 'cut' or diluted with other substances. Some of these substances mimic the taste or appearance of cocaine. There is not a great deal of information on the adulterants found in street cocaine, but glucose, lactose, baking soda and even talcum powder have been found. However, there is little evidence to suggest that harmful contaminants such as powdered glass or rat poison are intentionally used.

## How many people use cocaine?

Cocaine has been tried by very few Australians. According to the 2001 National Drug Household Survey, 4% of the Australian population reported using cocaine at some time, with 1% having used it in the last 12 months.

The average age at first use was 23 years.

The 1999 Secondary School Survey also indicated that very few young people attending high school across Australia had ever experimented with cocaine with 4% of 12-17 year old males and 3% of females ever reporting use.

- 6% of 17 year old males reported ever using cocaine
- 2% of 17 year old females reported ever using cocaine
- 4% of 12 year old males reported ever using cocaine
- 2% of 12 year old females reported ever using cocaine

## Other names for cocaine

Cocaine is also known as coke, Charlie, snow, blow, toot, C, crack, cola, nose candy and white dust.

### What are the short-term effects of cocaine?

The short-term effects of using cocaine may include:

- euphoria and well-being
- increased alertness
- increased self-confidence
- reduction of appetite
- decreased fatigue
- headache
- inability to sleep

### What are the long-term effects of cocaine?

The long-term effects of using cocaine regularly after some time may include:

- sleep disorders
- sexual problems, often impotence
- snorting which can lead to perforation of the nasal membranes and septum
  - runny nose, nose bleeds and loss of sense of smell
- facial tics or involuntary jerking of the body
- psychosis
- seizures
- heart attacks, strokes and respiratory failure
- social and financial problems