

# COCAINE

## THE FACTS



[www.drugaware.com.au](http://www.drugaware.com.au)

**CRACK**

**CHARLIE**

**C**

**COKE**

**FREEBASE**

## **THE LAW**

The use, possession, manufacture or supply of cocaine carries heavy fines and/or prison sentences. Penalties range from a \$2,000 fine and/or two years in prison, to a \$100,000 fine and/or imprisonment for 25 years. In addition, any person convicted of a drug offence will receive a criminal record. This can lead to difficulties in getting a job, credit, or visas for overseas travel.

## **WHAT IS COCAINE?**

Cocaine is a stimulant drug. This means that it affects the central nervous system by speeding up the activity of certain chemicals in the brain, producing a feeling of increased alertness and reduced fatigue.

## **WHERE DOES COCAINE COME FROM?**

Cocaine is manufactured from the coca plant, which grows naturally in Peru and Bolivia. For centuries, the Peruvian Indians chewed coca leaves to lessen fatigue caused by high altitude living. In 1859, a technique was discovered to extract cocaine hydrochloride from the coca leaves, which was used as an effective local anaesthetic. Cocaine hydrochloride was also used in many commercial products and was an ingredient in Coca-Cola until 1903. In the 1920s, cocaine was banned in most Western countries, except for medical use.

## **HOW IS COCAINE USED?**

Cocaine is usually snorted or swallowed, but can be injected or smoked in the form of crack or freebase. Smoking crack or freebase is uncommon in Australia.

## HOW MANY PEOPLE USE COCAINE?

The 2004 National Drug Strategy Household Survey reported that 5% of Western Australians aged 14 years and over had ever used cocaine. In total, 1% of Western Australians aged 14 years and over had used cocaine in the last year and less than 1% had used cocaine in the last four weeks. Cocaine use was highest among 20- to 29 year-olds, with 10% having ever used the drug.

## HEALTH EFFECTS OF USING COCAINE

The effects of cocaine will vary from person to person depending on characteristics of the:

- **Individual (user)** – Mood, physical size, health, gender, previous experience with cocaine, expectations of the drug, personality, whether the person has had food and whether other drugs have been taken
- **Drug** – The amount used, its purity, and whether it is smoked, swallowed, snorted or injected
- **Setting (environment)** – Whether the person is using with friends, on his/her own, in a social setting or at home, at work or before driving.

<b>SHORT-TERM EFFECTS</b>	<b>EFFECTS OF HIGHER DOSES</b>	<b>LONG-TERM EFFECTS</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• increased breathing rate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• intense anxiety and cold sweats</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• dependence</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• increased pulse rate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sleeplessness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• tolerance</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• high body temperature</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• heart seizures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• aggressive or violent behaviour</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• increased blood pressure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• uncontrollable tremors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• loss of appetite</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reduced appetite</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• arms and legs may feel heavy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• irritability or emotional disturbances</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• anxiety</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• aggressive behaviour</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• restlessness</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• increased alertness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• depression</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• paranoia</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• irritability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• confusion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• periods of psychosis</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• feeling of wellbeing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• fainting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• auditory hallucinations</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• suspiciousness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• hallucinations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• convulsions</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• exaggerated feelings of confidence and energy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• overdose</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• weight loss</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• enlarged pupils</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sensations of insects crawling on or under the skin</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• malnutrition</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• inability to sleep</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• burst blood vessels in the brain</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reduced resistance to infection</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• psychosis (a serious break with reality, hallucinations and delusions)</li> </ul>	

There are also dangerous effects associated with the method of use. Snorting can damage the fragile mucous membrane in the nasal passages. It produces burns and sores on the membranes that line the interior of the nose.

Injecting cocaine can result in blocked blood vessels that can cause major damage to the body's organs, inflamed blood vessels and abscesses, blood poisoning, bacterial infections which may damage the heart valves, vein collapse, infection at injection site, bruising or more serious injuries if users inject into an artery or tissue.

## **COCAINE AND OTHER DRUGS**

Cocaine users may use other drugs such as minor tranquillisers, cannabis, alcohol, or heroin to cope with some of the undesirable effects of cocaine and a dependence on several drugs may develop. For example, users may find themselves needing cocaine to get them going in the day and tranquillisers each night to go to sleep. This kind of dependence can lead to a variety of very serious physical and psychological problems.

Using more than one drug on any one occasion (poly-drug use) increases the risk of complications and serious side effects. An example is the use of cocaine and then another drug, such as amphetamines, while the cocaine is still active in the body. As street cocaine is rarely pure, the users cannot be certain which other drugs have been added to the cocaine. This can result in unplanned poly-drug use and serious side-effects.

## **COCAINE AND MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS**

Cocaine use can cause anxiety, depression, paranoia and psychosis in those people who have a vulnerability to mental health problems.

## RELATIONSHIPS

Drug use can lead to social and emotional problems and can affect users' relationships with family and friends. For example, users may develop paranoid behaviour and become difficult to live with, focus only on drugs and have no time for friends, or argue about money.

## TOLERANCE, DEPENDENCE AND WITHDRAWAL

Regular, heavy cocaine use can lead to tolerance and dependence.

- **Tolerance** – This means that a person needs more of the drug to achieve the same effects they did previously with smaller amounts. Tolerance to cocaine can develop over a short period of time.
- **Dependence** – This means that the drug becomes central to a person's life and they feel they cannot function properly without it. Dependence also develops quickly with cocaine because of the short acting nature of the drug.
- **Withdrawal** – When the use of cocaine is reduced or stopped, withdrawal symptoms may occur. These symptoms can include fatigue, hunger, depression, reduced energy levels, irritability, agitation, insomnia, paranoia, aggression, anxiety or cravings for the drug.

## OVERDOSE

Overdose occurs when the level of intoxication from the drug reaches a point where it begins to produce physical and/or psychological harm. Overdose from cocaine usually results from the drug's stimulatory and anaesthetic properties. Cocaine can cause an increase in heart rate, seizures and hyperventilation. In some cases, a person may experience heart failure, respiratory failure, burst blood vessels in the brain and death.

The risk of overdose generally increases with a larger dose. As the strength and content of street cocaine is unknown it can be difficult to judge the dose, increasing the risk of overdose.

## **COCAINE, PREGNANCY AND BREASTFEEDING**

Research indicates that effects of cocaine use during pregnancy may cause bleeding, miscarriage, premature labour and stillbirth.

Cocaine increases the heart rate in both the mother and baby, and the supply of blood and oxygen to the baby is reduced. This means the baby is more likely to be small both before and after birth. If cocaine is used close to birth, the baby may be born intoxicated, showing symptoms of hyperactivity and agitation. Withdrawal symptoms can occur in the babies of mothers who use cocaine regularly. These include sleeplessness and lack of responsiveness.

To date, research is inconclusive as to whether children of mothers who use cocaine experience any long-term mental or physical effects. Some studies suggest that malformations of the genito-urinary tract, heart, limbs and/or face occur in the babies of women who use cocaine.

It is likely that cocaine will reach the baby through breast milk. The effect this has on the baby will depend on factors such as the amount and strength of cocaine used and the time between using cocaine and feeding the baby. Symptoms may include the baby being irritable, unsettled and difficult to feed.

Injecting cocaine also increases the risk of HIV infection and other disease for both the mother and the baby.

It is recommended that women check with their doctor (or other health professional) if they are using or planning to use drugs while pregnant or breastfeeding, including prescribed and over-the-counter medicines.

## **COST**

The street price of cocaine depends on availability and market trends. The cost of purchasing cocaine can lead to financial problems for both occasional and regular users.

## **COCAINE AND DRIVING**

Cocaine can cause exaggerated feelings of confidence, which may result in users taking greater risks and overestimating their driving abilities.

Cocaine, taken in combination with alcohol, can greatly impair driving performance.

In Western Australia, it is against the law for anyone to drive under the influence of drugs, including cocaine. The Road Traffic Act 1974 Section 63 states that 'a person who drives or attempts to drive a motor vehicle while under the influence of alcohol, drugs, or alcohol and drugs to such an extent as to be incapable of having proper control of the vehicle commits an offence, and the offender may be arrested without warrant'. Breaking this law carries penalties including disqualification from driving, fines and/or imprisonment. A person convicted of an offence under the Road Traffic Act 1974 is liable for the following:

### **First Offence**

- a fine ranging from \$400 to \$2,500
- disqualification from holding or obtaining a driver's licence for up to six months.

## **Second Offence**

- a fine ranging from \$800 to \$3,500 or imprisonment for six months
- disqualification from holding or obtaining a driver's licence for up to two years.

## **Third or Subsequent Offence**

- a fine ranging from \$800 to \$5,000 or imprisonment for 18 months
- permanent disqualification from holding or obtaining a driver's licence.

## **TAKING CARE**

To be safe, cocaine use should be avoided. However, if you or someone you use the drug or know someone who is using the drug, remember the following:

- Because using cocaine can have harmful effects, users can find themselves in dangerous situations. Therefore, they should not be left alone.
- If you suspect any bad effects, call an ambulance immediately. Don't delay, you could save a life. The ambulance officers are there to help you. Be sure to describe what drug the person has taken. If the user is unconscious and you know first aid, place them in the recovery position and ensure the airway is clear. If they have stopped breathing, provide Expired Air Resuscitation (EAR). The police are not required to attend unless a death has occurred or the ambulance officers are threatened.
- It is safer not to inject drugs. If, however, you or someone you know does inject, use clean equipment (needle, syringe, swab, tourniquet, spoon, glass, filter and sterile water) and don't share gear. Fitpacks® which contain clean syringes are available from:

- most pharmacies
- needle and syringe exchange programs. (For information on opening times and locations of these programs phone the Alcohol and Drug Information Service, contact details are outlined at the back of this booklet)
- some regional hospitals, health centres and nursing posts.

## **TREATMENT PATHWAYS**

There are a variety of treatment pathways available for people with cocaine-related problems. The drug(s) used and the availability of services as well as the user's health, desired outcome, support network and unique circumstances need to be taken into consideration. Deciding on the best treatment pathway or combination of pathways is best done in consultation with a drug and alcohol counsellor.

## **MORE INFORMATION**

For up-to-date information about cocaine or other drugs call the Alcohol and Drug Information Service or Parent Drug Information Service, or visit [www.drugaware.com.au](http://www.drugaware.com.au)

### **Alcohol and Drug Information Service**

- Access information about drugs confidentially and quickly.
- Talk to a professionally trained counsellor about alcohol or other drugs.
- Find out about other services.

(08) 9442 5000

1800 198 024 toll free country callers

### **Parent Drug Information Service**

- Drug information and support for parents and family members.
- Talk to a professionally trained counsellor about alcohol and other drugs.
- Talk confidentially to another parent for strategies and support.
- Find out where to go for further help.

(08) 9442 5050

1800 653 203 toll free country callers

[www.drugaware.com.au](http://www.drugaware.com.au)

- Access detailed information about drugs.
- Find out about the latest issues.
- Post questions and have them answered anonymously by health professionals.
- Find links to other useful sites.

*For further information about the Drug and Alcohol Office's Prevention Directorate programs, publications or resources call (08) 9370 0358 or visit [www.dao.health.wa.gov.au](http://www.dao.health.wa.gov.au)*

**CHARLIE**

**CRACK**

**COKE**

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or for confidential advice and counselling call the Alcohol and  
Drug Information Service 24 hour helpline  
on 9442 5000 or 1800 198 024 (country callers).**