

Cocaine: What You Need to Know

Young people are surrounded by pro-drug messages in the media and on the Internet. They may try cocaine for the excitement or the experience without realizing the very real risks and consequences that come with cocaine use.

As a parent, you are your child's first and best protection against drug use. The following is information from the American Academy of Pediatrics about cocaine and how to help your child say "No" to drug use. (*Child* refers to child or teen in this publication.)

Cocaine use affects health and well-being

Cocaine stimulates the nervous system, causing brief euphoric feelings, increased alertness, talkativeness, and a sense of empowerment. People *high* on cocaine can also be sweaty, restless, and dizzy, and have nausea and vomiting. People *coming down* from cocaine effects may feel sad, have delusions or paranoia, and even think about suicide.

Acute effects

Cocaine use increases heart rate and blood pressure, and can lead to abnormal heart rhythms and lethal heart attacks—even in young people who are healthy. Cocaine use can also cause seizures and strokes.

Cocaine is a very addictive drug

Cocaine is highly addictive. Cocaine use, even soon after starting, leads to loss of control over use, and strong cravings to use more and more cocaine more often. Drug use must continue regularly or else the user will have withdrawal symptoms, including lethargy, muscle weakness, irritability, slowed comprehension, and depression. Drug addiction does not have a quick and easy cure, but medical care is a very important part of addressing addiction and recovering health.

How is cocaine used?

Cocaine is sold as a powder and is usually inhaled, or *snorted*, through the nose. The powder also can be melted into a liquid and injected directly into a vein.

Crack is a smokable form of cocaine that is prepared from powder cocaine. Crack is relatively inexpensive. Smoking crack increases not only the rapidity and intensity of the cocaine high, but also the risk of addiction.

Signs of cocaine use

Recognizing the signs of drug use is the first step in getting help for your child, but some signs are vague. Consider cocaine or other drug use if your child

- Spends less time with family and friends and more time alone or away from home
- Loses contact with friends or changes friends
- Is frequently irritable and argumentative, and often loses control of his behavior

- Begins to skip classes, shows up late for school, or has a drop in grades
- Loses interest in hobbies
- Stays out all night or runs away
- Develops sleep or appetite problems
- Has a big change in weight or appearance
- Shoplifts or steals money
- Possesses drugs or drug paraphernalia, such as mirrors, razor blades, spoons, or lighters

What you can do

Take these steps to help prevent your child from becoming interested in using cocaine or other drugs.

- **Set high expectations and clear limits. Instill strong values.** Let your child know that you expect her *not* to use drugs. Teach her healthy values that are important to your family and to use these values when deciding what is right and wrong.
- **Talk with your child about the dangers of drug use, including cocaine.** Young people who do not know the facts may try drugs just to see what they are like. Start talking with your child at an early age about the dangers of drug use. Encourage him to ask questions and tell you about his concerns. Be sure to really listen. Do not lecture or do all the talking. Ask what he thinks about drug use and its risks.
- **Use teachable moments.** Discuss car accidents and other tragedies that are caused by drug use and are in the news or your child's life.
- **Help your child handle peer pressure.** Peers and others can strongly influence young people to try drugs. As a parent, your influence can be even stronger in helping your child learn to be confident, make healthy choices, and resist unhealthy peer pressure. Tell her that it is OK to say "No!" to risky behaviors and mean what she says. Help her find and spend time enjoying positive interests that build self-esteem.
- **Help your child deal with physical body changes.** During adolescence, boys and girls undergo a growth spurt associated with weight gain and change in body shape. Some teens are tempted to use stimulant drugs, such as cocaine, to lose or control their weight. Reassure your child that body changes are normal and healthy. Talk about the unrealistic body shape standards that media and the fashion world portray. Help your child feel good about his changing body and encourage him to talk with his doctor about healthy diet and exercise choices.
- **Help your child deal with emotions.** Especially during the teen years, many young people face strong emotions for the first time. Teens sometimes get depressed or anxious and might consider drug use to try to escape these feelings and forget problems. Explain that everyone has these feelings at times, so it is important for each person to learn how to express her feelings, cope with them, and face stressors in healthy ways that can help prevent or resolve problems.

- **Set a good example.** Avoid using tobacco and illicit drugs. Minimize alcohol use, and always avoid drinking and driving. Be a good role model in the ways you express, control, and relieve stress, pain, or tension. Actions do speak louder than words!
- **Get a professional evaluation.** If you think your child is using drugs, tell your child's doctor your exact concerns. Your child's doctor can help.

The information contained in this publication should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.

From your doctor

