

Cocaine addiction: history, effects and symptoms



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Cocaine Addiction

An Overview of Cocaine Addiction

What is Cocaine?

Cocaine is a stimulant drug that produces a greater effect of 'high' than other drugs such as methamphetamine. It comes in a form of white powder or crystal form with a bitter numbing taste. In general, the powder form is mixed with other materials such as talcum powder, icing sugar, cornstarch or other drugs such as amphetamine or procaine. Cocaine is derived from coca leaves, then processed into cocaine hydrochloride to produce the base of the drug which is developed into two forms recognized as crack and freebase.

White crack typically comes in the shape of crystals varies in color from creamy or white to a transparent color with a yellow or pink tinge whereas freebase is the white crystalline powder form. Cocaine generally snorted through the nasal tissues hence absorbed into the bloodstream. Some people also rub the drug at their gums and swallowing it. Ways of ingesting it depends on the preference of the users, some want a rapid high sensation would inject it or inhale it as a vapor or smoke. Cocaine is widely known by many names that includes pepsi, coke, crack, Charlie, base, sugar block and rock.

Brief History

Cocaine was once misclassified as a narcotic drug that depresses the nervous system. It is a powerful stimulant and indigenous natives chewed the coca leaves for boosts of energy. The natives believed it was given by

the God and reserves the coca's pleasure for royalties and high priests. In overtime, the coca leaves were spread to the common people. In 1860, the secret of the coca leaves caught the attention of a pharmaceutical company located in Germany. In the facility, the ancient coca leaf collided with modern chemistry and the drug's active ingredients are isolated from coca's chemical properties by chemist, Albert Niemann. After the chemical isolation, a crystal substance is formed and it was named Cocaine which derives from "coca" and the alkaloid suffix "-ine". Niemann stripped the leaves of its mono rating substances and unknowingly created the world's most addictive drug.

How it is used?

There are four common ways of ingesting cocaine which are oral, intravenous, intranasal and inhalation. In other street terms it is called chewing, injecting or mainlining, snorting and smoking. Intravenous use is a method of using a hypodermic needle to inject cocaine directly into the bloodstream causing instant intense effect to the user. Whereas intranasal administration is the process of snorting powdered cocaine through the external opening of the nose. Smoking cocaine requires breathing in the smoke or vapor of a burning cocaine into the lungs where the effects are sucked up into the bloodstream to create instantaneous euphoric high as such injecting cocaine. Users should be aware that there are absolute no safe way of using cocaine as the listed methods of using the drug result in absorption of toxic amounts of cocaine, cerebrovascular emergencies, acute cardiovascular and seizures that can to sudden death.

Effects on the brain

Cocaine activates norepinephrine, dopamine and serotonin, chemicals that stimulates movements, excitement and feelings of pleasure. Normally, when you get excited, startle, and frighten the brain makes you react in order to get out from harm's way. Cocaine works in the similar way in the brain automatically without you needing it to occur. This addictive drug is a powerful central nervous system stimulant that stimulates the growth of neurotransmitter dopamine in the brain which is responsible to regulate movement and pleasure. Generally, dopamine is freed by neurons in response to potential rewards and reprocess back into the cell that freed it and eventually shutting off signals in linked with neurons. Cocaine stops the dopamine from being reused thus leading to excessive number of dopamine to develop in the synapse. This process causes amplification of the dopamine signals and eventually disrupts standard brain communication. The overflow of dopamine is the main cause of creating the cocaine's euphoric high. Constant heavy usage of the cocaine can cause permanent long-term modification of the brain's reward system and also other systems of the brain.

Effects on the lungs

Smoking cocaine is the main contribution to the majority lung and breathing complications. Users smoke crack, freebase or paste by using water pipes, glass pipes or cigarettes, heated using matches or butane lighters. Residue from the cocaine contaminants, matches, tars and additives as such marijuana usually causes chronic coughing, bronchitis, and coughing black

phlegm thus leading to multiple chest pain and shortness of breath. The practice of breath holding and deep inhalation technique maximizes the volume of cocaine inhaled and the absorption and can cause collapsing of the lung. At times, users often express sharp pains in the chest area due to deep breathing, neck pain, painful swallowing and buildup of air under the skin located at the neck area called subcutaneous emphysema, which has a feature of crackling touch sensation similar to Rice Krispies cereal. In addition, smoking cocaine can also cause pulmonary edema, a condition of the lung being filled with fluids that can cause severe shortness in breath, respiratory failure and later death.

Effects on the heart

Cocaine stimulates the sympathetic nervous system that is mainly responsible for the fight response function which is controlled mostly by epinephrine or adrenaline. Increased of heart rates, high blood pressure and narrowing of blood vessels are the effects of using cocaine. Other type of cardiovascular complications that are caused by cocaine include rapid heart rate and abnormal heart rhythms known as cardiomyopathy.

Cardiomyopathy is a disease that weakens the walls of the aorta and causes aortic dissection and rupture of the heart muscle. Repeated use of cocaine can also cause narrowing in the arteries of the heart that can lead to the decrease of blood flow in the heart organ thus causing symptoms of angina, where heart muscles are deprived of oxygen-rich blood that usually cause death of heart tissues and heart attack. In addition, cocaine is also responsible for subsequent narrowing and accelerated hardening of the

coronary arteries of the heart which results in heart attacks and cardiac deaths among users from the age of 19 to 44 years of age.

Signs of Cocaine Abuse & Addiction

Cocaine is a drug that is highly addictive and interferes how the brain processes chemicals responsible for the feelings of pleasure. Users who are addicted to cocaine will lose control over the usage of the drug. Strong urges of need for the drug emerge from time to time although most users know the consequences after taking it. Here are some signs of cocaine addiction:

Mood SwingsThe drug cocaine causes addicts to “ crash” when they decide to quit. The term crash refers to moments where the addict’s mood swings changes rapidly from high to distress which causes addicts to continue taking it in order to feel normal. Excess of using the drug may lead to addiction.

Withdrawal symptomsAddicts who are addicted to cocaine may show withdrawal symptoms of the drug. Withdrawal symptoms may include hunger, depression, suicidal thoughts, intense cravings, extended sleep or restless sleep, irritability and exhaustion. Abusing cocaine will seem the easy way out to not experience any withdrawal symptoms thus bringing the addict back to relapsing the drug.

Change in BehaviorIf an addict abuses cocaine, their behavior will dramatically change after using the drug. The addict may seem happy or excited and acts more confidently to display an enthusiastic sense of well-

being. Addicts also may appear talkative than usual, sexually excited, energy levels increased and loss of food appetite.

Eye Changes

The most obvious signs of abusing cocaine is the addict's eyes. The pupil of their eyes are dilated and overly sensitive to light. The pupil is the black part in the eye and usually will constrict when there is light shone into it and get bigger when the presence of light is gone. Cocaine causes the addict's pupils to dilate or get bigger than its usual size.

Nasal Effect Other signs of cocaine addiction include nasal effects. Cocaine addicts usually have runny noses and nose bleed after prolonged use of the drug. Cocaine is heavily snorted through the nasal passages resulting narrowing in blood vessels which can cause blood pressure to increase and decrease in blood flow to the nasal cavity tissues. Without the right amount of blood supply to the nasal cavity tissues, the normal function of the nose may undergo massive damages such as loss of sense of smell and overall health may also be affected. Family members and loved ones should also be on the look-out for traces of white colored powder around the addict's nose as an indication of cocaine abuse.

Skin Effect

Another sign of cocaine abuse is scratching of the skin. Cocaine users typically experience irritating crawling feelings under the skin. This crawling feeling is known as 'snow bugs' or 'cocaine bugs'. Addicts describe the feeling of cocaine bugs as burning, itching, biting and creeping. Some

addicts will tend to always scratch their skin until it bleeds to ease the irritation. Keep an eye for small bleeding wounds and formation of scabs on your loved ones to identify the abuse of cocaine.

Over-Heating

Regular cocaine addicts will always find themselves sweating excessively due to dramatic increase of the body temperature. Addicts may also hallucinate and feel agitated, confused and paranoid easily. Family members should notice behaviors of their loved ones such as constant pulling off their clothes or tries to cool down the body with cold showers, wandering the streets without reasons and violent behaviors as signs of cocaine addiction.

Treating Cocaine Addiction

Without proper treatment, cocaine addiction and abuse can lead to destructive injuries and irreversible harm. In due course, similar to other substance addiction it will cause overdose, accidents, chronic health issues and death. At Solace Sabah, we offer the latest drug recovery program that incorporates cutting edge psychotherapies, modern medicines, committed aftercare, family integration and customized treatment plans. Every client will be provided with thorough and effective care for even the worst possible case of drug addiction. If you find your loved one is relying highly on cocaine and powerless to stop using the drug, treatment and immediate intervention are their best option for a chance to live a healthy life again. Contact us today at Solace Sabah to gain an understanding on how our in-depth addiction treatment program can help your loved ones to start the recovery journey.

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