Why is cocaine dangerous?

Cocaine can cause a heart attack
Cocaine makes the heart work harder and faster. Even young people with healthy hearts can have heart attacks from using cocaine.

Using alcohol with cocaine makes the effects on the heart worse.

Cocaine can damage the brain
It can make blood vessels in the brain burst. It can cause strokes, seizures and coma.
Cocaine can stop the brain from telling the heart and lungs to work. The heart may beat wildly and then stop beating. The lung muscles may quit working. Then a person stops breathing.

Cocaine can damage the heart or brain the first time a person uses it. Cocaine can kill.

What does cocaine do to babies?

When a pregnant woman uses cocaine, her unborn baby uses cocaine too. The woman may have a miscarriage.

The baby may:
- Be born too early.
- Have a smaller head, be shorter and weigh less at birth.
- Have a hard time learning later in school.
- Have problems paying attention or sitting still.

The best way to reduce the risk to an unborn baby is not to use any drugs.

To Learn More

Cocaine Anonymous
Look online or in a local telephone book to find numbers.
www.ca.org

National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (NCADD)
1-800-622-2255
www.ncadd.org

National Institute on Drug Abuse
www.drugabuse.gov

Professional models were used in all photos.
This brochure is not intended as a substitute for your health care professional's opinion or care.
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What is cocaine?
Cocaine is a very powerful drug. Like all drugs, cocaine changes the way the body works.
Cocaine is a white powder. It comes from the leaves of the coca plant. It is snorted, rubbed into the gums, injected or smoked.
Cocaine powder is also called coke, blow, powder or snow.
Crack is a dangerous form of cocaine. It’s made by heating cocaine with other chemicals until it looks like lumps of soap. Crack is also called rock, ready-rock, base or freebase.

Is cocaine illegal?
It's against the law for most people to use, possess, buy or sell cocaine.
Cocaine can be used legally by a doctor to numb an area before surgery. There are no medical uses for crack.

People who sell cocaine often mix in other powders or drugs. There's no way to know for sure what's really in cocaine.

Why do people use cocaine?
People may start using cocaine because:
- Their friends use it and they want to fit in.
- They're curious about what cocaine will do. They think it will make them feel happy or give them more energy.
- They don't know it can hurt them.
People start using cocaine for lots of reasons. They keep using cocaine because they can't stop. They're addicted.

How addictive is cocaine?
Cocaine is one of the most addictive drugs known.
Cocaine makes people feel good quickly. That feeling lasts for about 5 to 30 minutes. Then they feel very bad. When the good feeling fades, the person feels let down, tired and very depressed.
To keep from feeling bad, people use more cocaine. A person who has to use the drug to keep from feeling bad is addicted.
Even after stopping cocaine use, the cravings are strong. This can cause people to use it again.

What does cocaine do to the body?
- Cocaine changes the brain. It changes how it looks and works.
- Cocaine causes a high feeling or rush.
- Cocaine can affect thinking. It can make it hard to remember, make decisions or pay attention.
- Cocaine makes the heart beat faster and blood pressure go up. Body temperature rises and pupils in the eyes get bigger.
- Cocaine can make people feel awake, even when they're tired. Cocaine users often can't sleep and talk a lot. Cocaine can push a person's body until it crashes.
- Cocaine takes away the urge to eat. Users can get sick and lose weight.
- Cocaine can cause dizziness and shaking. Long-term use can cause Parkinson's disease.
- Cocaine lowers blood flow in the gut. This can cause sores and make tissue rot.
- Smoking crack causes a sore throat and hoarse voice. It can damage the lungs. Crack users often cough a lot and have trouble breathing.
- Snorting cocaine damages the nose. Users can't smell and get nosebleeds. Their nose runs.
- Injecting cocaine can cause sores and infections in the veins.
- Cocaine users react more to things they hear, see and feel.
- Cocaine can make users see, hear, feel and taste things that aren't there. Some feel bugs crawling on them. Others hear voices. Some taste food that isn't there.
- Cocaine can make users not trust other people. They can think people are after them.
- Cocaine users may be a danger to themselves. Sometimes users think they can fly. Or they may try to stop a car by standing in front of it.
- Cocaine use can lead to risky sexual behavior and IV needle sharing. This increases the risk of getting HIV. Cocaine slows the body's fight against HIV.