



Patient education: Cocaine use disorder (The Basics)

[Written by the doctors and editors at UpToDate](#)

What is cocaine? — Cocaine is a drug that comes from the leaves of the coca plant. It is used in some prescription medicines to treat pain. It is also used illegally, usually in these 2 forms:

- A white powder that is snorted through the nose or mixed in water and injected into a vein
- Rock crystals (called "crack") that are smoked

Cocaine has many different common or "street" names and is sometimes used with other illegal drugs ([table 1](#)).

What does illegal cocaine use do to the brain and body? — Cocaine can make you feel alert, full of energy, and very happy. It can also make you feel less sleepy and less hungry than normal.

Cocaine can also make you:

- Feel anxious, irritable, or restless
- Have panic attacks
- Feel suspicious or paranoid
- More likely to make bad or unsafe decisions
- Have delusions – This means believing things that are not true.
- Have hallucinations – This means seeing, hearing, tasting, or smelling things that are not really there.
- Tremble or shake
- Have trouble controlling your body
- Pick at your skin
- Have a fast heartbeat
- Sweat
- Feel sick to your stomach (nausea)

People who use large amounts of cocaine over a long period of time can have problems with thinking, memory, attention, and making decisions. They also have a higher chance of suicide than people who do not use cocaine.

Who uses illegal cocaine? — About 2 percent of Americans older than 14 use illegal cocaine. Most users are men ages 15 to 35 who live in cities. Some people use cocaine only once in a while. But others take large amounts over short periods of time. This is called a "binge."

What is cocaine use disorder? — Cocaine use disorder is basically the medical term for cocaine addiction. It can be mild to severe. People with cocaine use disorder have 2 or more of the following problems. The more of these they have, the more severe their disorder.

- They end up using more cocaine than they planned to, or they use it for longer than they planned to.
- They wish they could cut down on cocaine, but they can't.
- They spend a lot of time trying to get cocaine, getting high, or recovering from being high.
- They crave or have a strong desire or urge to use cocaine.
- Because of their cocaine use, they often don't do things that they need to or that are expected of them, such as go to work or school, remember family events, and clean their home.
- They keep using cocaine even if it causes or worsens problems in their relationships or interactions with other people.
- They stop or cut back on important social, work, or fun activities they used to do.
- They keep using cocaine even in situations where it is dangerous to do so (such as while driving).
- They keep using cocaine even when they know they have a physical or mental problem that was probably caused or made worse by their drug use.
- They need to use more and more cocaine to get the same effects they used to get with less. Or they get less effect from using the amount that used to get them high. This is called "tolerance."
- They have "withdrawal symptoms" if they stop using cocaine after using it for a long time. Withdrawal symptoms can include:
 - Feeling sad or depressed
 - Feeling tired
 - Having dreams that are unpleasant and seem very real
 - Sleeping too little or too much
 - Hunger
 - Being restless or moving little or slowly

How is cocaine addiction treated? — In general, treatment involves addiction counseling and taking part in a support group.

- Addiction counseling – People with addiction work with a counselor to better understand their addiction. They learn new ways to lead their life that do not involve drugs.
- Support groups – In support groups, people with addiction share their experiences with each other. The most common of these groups is Cocaine Anonymous (www.ca.org), but some people dislike that it involves God or a "higher power." There are other groups that do not have that as a focus.

Some people cannot stop using cocaine even with counseling and support groups. They might benefit from a more structured treatment program that includes specific types of therapy, behavioral exercises, and routine drug testing.

There are also a few medicines that are being studied to help people stay off cocaine. There is not enough proof yet that they work, so doctors are not ready to recommend them.

For specific situations, there are other treatments. An example is family therapy, which can be especially helpful for children or teens with addiction who have families willing to participate in treatment.

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GRAPHICS

Common street names for cocaine

Cocaine base (smokable)	Base, black rock, crack, electric kool-aid, rock, gravel, purple caps, Scotty, scramble, supercoke, twinkie, window pane, yam
Cocaine HCl	Aspirin, Big C, blow, coconut, coke, devil's dandruff, flake, Florida snow, foo-foo dust, happy dust, lady, nose candy, white dragon, white lady, yao
Cocaine paste	Basuco, bazooka, pasta
Cocaine in vagina	Balling
Cocaine + heroin	Belushi, bipping, blanco, boy-girl, dynamite, goof ball, he-she, murder one, sandwich, snowball, speedball
Cocaine + marijuana	51, banano, bazooka, blunt, C & M, candy sticks, caviar, champagne, cocktail, cocoa puff, crack bash, dirties, geek-joint, Greek, lace, P-dogs, premos, primo, Sherman stick, woo blunts, woolie
Cocaine + MDMA (ecstasy)	Bumping up
Cocaine + MDMA + LSD	Candy flipping on a string
Cocaine + methamphetamine	Croak, shabu
Cocaine + methcathinone	Wild cat
Cocaine + morphine	C & M
Cocaine + PCP	Beam me up Scottie, space ball, space base, space dust
Cocaine + tobacco	Cigamos, coolie, geek-joint
Cocaine + marijuana + PCP	Jim Jones, speed boat, squirrel, wickie
Cocaine + heroin + tobacco	Flamethrowers, primos
Cocaine + heroin + methamphetamine + flunitrazepam + alcohol	Five-way

Note that street names change over time and may differ by location. The same name might refer to more than one drug.

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