

# Cocaine

# The Facts



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive

**IT'S YOUR LIFE  
DON'T RUIN IT**

[www.drugs.ie](http://www.drugs.ie)

# Cocaine

## The Facts

Cocaine is made from the leaves of the coca plant, which grows mainly in South America. In Ireland it comes in two forms – cocaine powder and crack cocaine.

Cocaine powder is usually used by snorting through the nose. It is sometimes injected and has also been eaten.

Crack cocaine, also called 'rock', 'stone' or 'free-base', is a more addictive form of cocaine and is usually smoked.

## Effects

Cocaine is a powerful stimulant. It makes you feel more alert and energetic and also less hungry or thirsty. It can also give you headaches, chest pain, stomach pain, nausea or sickness, tremors, irritability, paranoia and hallucinations.

The effects can last for up to 20 minutes for each use. When the drug wears off you often feel low, exhausted, intensely irritable and restless.

Due to its powerful effects, you are left craving more, and as the body gets used to the drug, larger amounts are needed to achieve the same 'high' effect. Long term heavy use of cocaine can be followed by a 'crash' when stopped.

The after effects include fatigue, depression, restlessness, nausea, hyperactivity, insomnia and weight loss.

## Using cocaine puts your physical and mental health at risk.

- Cocaine use can cause chest pain, raised blood pressure, heart attack, respiratory (breathing) problems, strokes, seizures, kidney failure.
- Snorting cocaine damages the membranes which line the nose.
- Smoking crack can cause breathing problems and loss of voice.
- Injecting cocaine can cause abscesses and infections such as Hepatitis C and HIV if equipment is shared.

- Anxiety and panic attacks are common. These can continue after cocaine use has stopped.
- Erratic behaviour, agitation, irritability and paranoia can lead to aggressive behaviour and irrational violence.
- Paranoid thinking can lead to anxiety and progress to psychotic illness.
- You may experience 'grandiosity' – where you have an exaggerated belief in your importance and abilities, sometimes reaching delusional proportions. This can lead you to take risks, particularly when driving, leading to accidents.

## **Using cocaine – You risk addiction!**

Overall about one in seven people who try cocaine become dependent. About one in 20 become dependent in the first year of use.

Research shows that women are three to four times more likely to become cocaine dependent in the first year of use than men.

People who have stopped using cocaine stopped for the following reasons:\*

- **42%** - because they couldn't afford it;
- **32%** - because of health concerns; and
- **32%** - were influenced by family and friends.

\* Figures from 'An Overview of Cocaine Use in Ireland: II – The National Advisory Committee on Drugs, 2007'.

## Cocaine and other drugs.

Cocaine overdoses are unpredictable. Using cocaine with other drugs, particularly alcohol is even more risky. Cocaine and alcohol combine in the body to form another drug – **cocaethylene** – which is more toxic than either drug on its own.

Nine out of ten people who reported cocaine as their main drug also used other drugs most commonly alcohol, cannabis and ecstasy.

Cocaine is less than 25% pure. You cannot tell the difference by looking at it. The most common additions found in cocaine include:

- **Lignocaine** - a local anaesthetic which numbs the gums like cocaine does and fools you into thinking the drug is purer than it actually is. This drug also affects the heart.
- **Phenacetin** – a painkiller which is no longer available for human use because of the kidney damage it causes.
- **Caffeine**
- **Mannitol** – a sugar based substance.



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive

For more information on drugs  
and drug services contact:

HSE infoline **1850 24 1850**

**[www.drugs.ie](http://www.drugs.ie)**

Text '**drugs**' to **51900**



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive

**IT'S YOUR LIFE  
DON'T RUIN IT**

**[www.drugs.ie](http://www.drugs.ie)**

This leaflet can be ordered from your  
local health promotion department  
or **[www.healthinfo.ie](http://www.healthinfo.ie)**

Publication date: February 2008

Review date: February 2010

Order code: HPM00495