

# FRANK

## cocaine

### WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW



**So, taking cocaine is all about good times – feeling confident, talking funny nonsense with your mates and making your nights out last longer.**

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# But what about the bad times? Like when you are feeling paranoid, the next day comedown or the nights when all you can think about is your next line?

Cocaine can make you feel good, but it's very addictive and it can easily become a habit that controls your life. And it's not as safe as you may think it is – there are some serious risks to your health as well as to your friendships, family life and future.

If you are thinking about taking cocaine or if you already use it, then this is for you. It explains what cocaine does to you – both mentally and physically – as well as the risks, the law and where you can get further help and information.

For more info and confidential advice you can call **FRANK on 0800 77 66 00** or go to **talktofrank.com**

# the facts

**Cocaine is also called blast, blow, booth, c, cola, charlie, coke, divits, ivory flakes, nose candy, percy, railers, ringer, snow, toot, white or white dust.**

Cocaine is a white powder made from the leaves of the South American coca plant. The chopped and crushed leaves are mixed with solvents like petrol, then treated with various chemicals, such as sulphuric acid. Kerosene is used to extract the crude cocaine, which receives further chemical treatment. The final product is the cocaine salt, also known as 'powder' cocaine. More chemicals are needed to convert the salt form to freebase or 'crack' cocaine, which usually looks like small lumps or 'rocks'.

Cocaine increases the levels of the chemical, dopamine, which is present in the gap between nerve cells by blocking its removal back in to the cells. This 'flooding' of dopamine overexcites the receptors that are present on many brain cells, causing hyperactive and stimulant brain effects, as well as powerfully activating the 'reward pathway' that is involved in feeling 'high' and in developing addiction. This stimulant effect also puts extra strain on the heart.



**In the short term, cocaine stimulation can make you feel confident and wide awake. But repeated use can cause agitated behaviour, mood swings, severe addiction and heart attacks.**

Cocaine powder is soluble in body fluids and blood. It is usually chopped up with a credit card or razor blade and snorted through a straw or a rolled up bank note. But it can be rubbed onto the gums, bombed (swallowed) or prepared for injection. It is less easy to smoke than 'crack' cocaine and so, snorted, its effects are powerful but generally less intense than crack.

'Crack' and 'freebase' cocaine can be heated and smoked in a pipe. Smoking the crack gets it to the brain very rapidly and this is associated with a particularly rapid and euphoric high, followed by a quick come down and often a strong craving for more. If injected it is first converted to the soluble salt form.

# how pure is it?

Cocaine seized by the police in 2009 was on average only 33% pure. Cocaine is cut with other ingredients to increase the profit margins of drug dealers. It probably won't be cut with talc, Vim or rat poison – that's a bit of an urban myth. But it could be cut with other drugs and chemicals. These include benzocaine (a pain reliever), phenacetin (an anaesthetic until it was linked to cancer) and lignocaine (a local anaesthetic). All of these can make your gums and mouth go numb – this can fool you into thinking that you have bought 'high quality' cocaine. Another substance used is tetramisole, a drug given to pets to expel or destroy tapeworms.

**You never know how pure cocaine is, which means you don't know how strong it is or what other drugs you may be taking and their side effects.**

# the law

**Cocaine is a Class A drug.  
The maximum penalty for  
possession is seven years in  
prison or an unlimited fine.**

For dealing – which includes giving or selling cocaine to your mates – it's life in prison and an unlimited fine or both. Possession and dealing are both treated very seriously by the police. And even if you are under 18, you can still be prosecuted.

**If you have a  
criminal record, it is  
harder to get a job  
and if you want to go  
abroad, you'll find  
that some countries  
will not let you in.**



# the good, the bad and the ugly

**Cocaine can change your personality. It affects the way you feel about yourself, the way you feel about others and the way that others see you.**

## **It can make you feel good about yourself:**

- > confident
- > excited
- > alert
- > energised
- > like you want to talk non-stop
- > sexually aroused

## **But it can make you feel bad:**

- > agitated or twitchy
- > nervous and paranoid that people are talking about you
- > upset because no one is listening to you because they are talking so much



## **And it can make you behave in an ugly way:**

- > arrogant and loud
- > aggressive
- > talking over everyone
- > only interested in doing your next line

## **How do you look?**


**You might feel confident and gorgeous but chances are you'll be:**

- > sweating
- > pale
- > staring
- > grinding your teeth

**"I do feel more confident chatting up women but I know that I look a bit mad and sweaty sometimes."**

**Paul, 19**





**"I can get really paranoid,  
especially when I've had  
a long night without any  
sleep. I think that everyone  
is talking about me and  
I've picked fights with  
my best mate and my  
boyfriend over nothing."**

Lucy, 20

# cocaine stories

**“Normally I’m really easy going but coke can make me really paranoid and aggressive. I’ve got into so many fights because I’ve convinced myself that someone is starting on me.”**

George, 23

**“Nobody really talks to each other when they are on coke. All you want to talk about is yourself. It doesn’t make you bond with your friends, it pushes you apart.”**

Luke, 21

# the risks

**If you take cocaine, there are risks to both your physical and mental health – the more you use and the longer you use it, the bigger the risks to:**

## **your life**

Cocaine increases your blood pressure, body temperature and heart rate. High doses of cocaine can cause convulsions, breathing difficulties or heart failure, which can lead to coma and death. In 2004, cocaine was recorded as a factor in 185 deaths.

## **your heart**

Cocaine can cause heart attacks – even if you are fit and healthy. If you have a pre-existing heart condition (which you might not know about), it can be really dangerous.



### **your mind**

You can get depression, anxiety and panic attacks. In extreme cases you can get cocaine-induced psychosis which has similar symptoms to schizophrenia.

### **your nose**

Snorting can damage the structure of your nose, so you can get nosebleeds and prolonged use can do serious damage.

### **your stomach**

Cocaine suppresses your appetite and when you take it you might get diarrhoea. Regular use can lead to digestive problems.

### **your sex life**

In the long run, you can lose interest in sex.

### **your nervous system**

There is some evidence of risk of long-term damage to your nervous system.

## **Did you know?**

The risk of having a heart attack can increase by more than 20-fold in the first hour after you have taken cocaine.





# sharing more than your coke

**Sharing straws, bank notes and needles may put you at risk of hepatitis B and C, and HIV infections. Snorting cocaine damages the lining of your nose and makes it open to infection.**

Blood and mucus are easily transferred onto straws and notes and these can spread disease when you share snorting equipment. (And you probably don't want to think about how the drug was brought into the country or the unhygienic places where lines get chopped out.) As well as spreading diseases if you share needles, injecting cocaine can cause vein damage, ulcers and gangrene.

# the comedown

**After taking cocaine, you'll probably feel like you've got a bit of a cold for about 24 hours.**

You might also feel tired, depressed or paranoid for a day or two. The more you take, the bigger the come-down especially if you have used cocaine over a number of days. It can be hard to concentrate at work or at college and you may just lose interest in everything else that's going on in your life. It's important not to make any big decisions while you're on a come-down, as the depression will affect your judgement.



**"You don't want to be around anyone when you're on a bad comedown. It's worst for me after a few days – on a Tuesday or Wednesday I can feel suicidal."**

Ali, 23

# mixing alcohol and cocaine

Taking cocaine when you are drinking may help you to stay awake and you might find that you can drink more without feeling as drunk. You may also get a more intense high than when taking cocaine on its own.

When you take the two together, a substance called cocaethylene forms in your body. This is a toxic substance that is more harmful than taking cocaine or alcohol on their own. Effectively your body is producing a third drug that it then has to try and get rid of – and it takes twice as long to leave your body than if you take cocaine on its own.

Cocaethylene has been linked with damage to the liver and heart.

## Did you know?

When you mix alcohol and cocaine, there is an increased risk of sudden death compared to taking cocaine on its own.





**"Half the time, I can't even remember if I had a good time or not, my nights out just blur into one. And the next day it's always the same rubbish feelings – my life isn't going anywhere, I haven't got a girlfriend, stuff like that."**

**Matt, 26**

**"I've had nosebleeds at work and once at my little sister's birthday party. I felt really awful."**

**John, 17**





# addiction – you can control it, right?

## **Cocaine is very addictive**

Cocaine is biologically more addictive than many other substances such as alcohol and cannabis. The effects of cocaine are powerful and short-lived – around 20-30 minutes. And as soon as the effects wear off, you are left wanting more. Just one line can soon turn into several fat ones. It can become difficult to resist the cravings and the drive to keep taking more, not least because cocaine alters the way your brain works.

So you start using more and more to get the same good feeling. And the more you use, the worse you feel the next day. So you might use more to try and put off your comedown. If this cycle starts to happen, it is quite easy for cocaine to stop being just a bit of fun.





**You might think you can't be an addict if you don't take it every day. But even if you just take cocaine at the weekends, it can start to control your life. And at around £40 a gram, it can be an expensive habit as well.**

**Using too much cocaine can affect your whole life. It can make you:**

- > get into debt and have money troubles
- > find it hard to concentrate at work or at college especially on the days when you are coming down
- > lose interest in family and friends
- > lose motivation to do anything other than cocaine
- > alienate the people who are closest to you



# more than a bit of fun

**If any of the following sounds familiar, it could mean that your cocaine habit is starting to become more than a bit of fun.**

- > Did you start off buying it with your friends but now buy your own?
- > Do you go out just so that you can take cocaine?
- > Do you find yourself doing more and more on a night out?
- > Do you try to give up, but get back on it as soon as you go out?
- > Do you think about cocaine even on days when you don't use it?





**"I didn't think I was addicted because I didn't use every day, but I would binge like mad all weekend and then have a massive comedown in the week. But even then I'd still be thinking about scoring and going out again.**

**Every weekend, I promised myself that I would stop but as soon as I went out, I'd be back on it straight away. The thing that sorted me out was Cocaine Anonymous. A mate took me to a meeting and I haven't had any coke since."**

**Chris, 22**

# relationships

**Most people take cocaine with their mates. Because it makes you talk a lot and helps you to stay out late, cocaine can seem like a sociable drug. And taking drugs together can feel like a bonding experience - especially if there's four of you crammed in a toilet cubicle.**

But cocaine can change friendships so that they become all about cocaine. You might talk a lot but is anyone listening to you? Or are they too busy trying to talk over you? And then there's the paranoia that your girlfriend or boyfriend is

flirting with someone else, or that all your mates are talking about you, or that someone is holding out and not sharing their cocaine with you. Some times it might feel like it is cocaine that is controlling your group of friends.



**"I was really depressed but I didn't think that it had anything to do with taking coke – even when I'd been admitted to hospital with depression. I didn't want to admit it to myself or anyone else. My family and friends could see that something was wrong but I'd get really angry if they tried to talk to me about it."**

Jo, 28



**"I only ever take it when I'm drinking so that I've got more energy. But now I'm starting to get bad comedowns. I get a bit paranoid sometimes and its affected my relationships."**

Kathy, 23



# but it's not harming anyone else

**So you know the risks but it's up to you isn't it? You might think that you aren't harming anyone by taking cocaine but the cocaine industry harms a lot of people.**

Most of the world's cocaine is produced in Bolivia, Colombia and Peru. To indigenous groups in these countries, chewing the coca leaf is part of their culture. But poverty and violence often forces farmers to grow coca leaves for the production of cocaine that is exported.

Buying cocaine also finances organised crime. Demand fuels robbery, gang violence and street crimes, sometimes with knives and guns.



**Around 80% of cocaine comes from Colombia, where drug related crime is the most common cause of death after cancer.**

**Money spent on cocaine finances:**

- > landmines
- > terrorism
- > kidnapping

**Drug mules**

Some cocaine is brought into the UK by drug couriers or mules. These people – usually women with dependent children – are poor, desperate and may not understand the consequences of what they are doing. The cocaine is put in condoms, which they swallow. If the condoms burst, they can die. They are also at risk of violence and intimidation by dealers as well as legal action if they are caught.

**Cocaine production affects the environment:**

- > tropical rain forest is destroyed so that farmers can grow cocaine. It is estimated that Colombia has lost over three million acres of tropical rainforest because of cocaine production.
- > illegal processing factories dump polluting chemicals that affect the local environment. It is reported that in Columbia every year, 20 million litres of acetone, 13 million litres of gasoline and 81 thousand litres of sulphuric acid are used to make coca leaves into cocaine. These chemicals are then thrown away, untreated, in rivers and streams.
- > One gram of cocaine corresponds to the destruction of 4sq metres of Colombian forest.



**"It makes you really greedy and selfish. When someone has some charlie, you'll do anything to get in with them. And if you've got some, everyone wants to be your best mate. The whole vibe of a night out changes. No one cares about anything but getting their next line. It's really disgusting seeing your mates behave like this – but you do it as well, you can't help it."**

**Yasmin, 21**



# advice and information

If you've got questions or concerns about cutting down or giving up, call **FRANK on 0800 77 66 00** 24 hours a day for friendly, confidential advice and information. Calls are free from landlines and some mobiles. There's also a textphone for the hard of hearing on **0800 917 8765**, or go to **talktofrank.com**, or email **frank@talktofrank.com**. Frank can also tell you what treatment services are available in your area.

## Adfam

Support materials for people with a family member who takes drugs. Can help you find local support groups.  
email: [admin@adfam.org.uk](mailto:admin@adfam.org.uk)

[www.adfam.org.uk](http://www.adfam.org.uk)

## Release

Provides expert advice and information on drugs, the law and human rights.  
tel: 0845 4500 215

email: [ask@release.org.uk](mailto:ask@release.org.uk)

[www.release.org.uk](http://www.release.org.uk)

## Cocaine anonymous

Helps people stop using cocaine and other drugs.  
tel: 0800 612 0225

[www.ca.org](http://www.ca.org)

## Shared Responsibility

Colombian government website that demonstrates the impact cocaine production has on their environment and people

[www.sharedresponsibility.gov.co](http://www.sharedresponsibility.gov.co)



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