

# “Cocaine: It’s Not a Party Drug”

## Poster Conversation Starter

### *What is cocaine and how is it used?*

- Cocaine is a powerfully addictive stimulant drug made from the leaves of the coca plant native to South America.
- Street dealers often mix it with things like cornstarch, talcum powder or flour to increase profits. They may also mix it with other drugs such as the stimulant amphetamine.
- People snort cocaine powder through the nose, rub it into their gums, dissolve it in water and inject it, or smoke it in the form of crack cocaine.
- Cocaine increases the level of the natural chemical messenger *dopamine* in brain circuits that control pleasure and movement. This flood of dopamine ultimately disrupts normal brain communication and causes cocaine’s high.

### *How does a cocaine overdose occur?*

- An overdose occurs when a person uses too much of a drug and has a toxic reaction that results in serious, harmful symptoms or death. An overdose can be intentional or unintentional.
- Death from an overdose can occur on the first use of cocaine or unexpectedly thereafter. Many people who use cocaine also drink alcohol at the same time, which is particularly risky and can lead to overdose. Others mix cocaine with heroin, another dangerous—and deadly—combination.
- Some of the most frequent and severe health consequences leading to an overdose involve the heart and blood vessels, including irregular heart rhythm and heart attacks, and the nerves, including seizures and strokes.

### *What are the side effects of using cocaine?*

#### Short-term effects

constricted blood vessels

nausea

faster heartbeat

seizures

paranoia/irritability

#### Long-term effects

chronic nosebleeds

malnourishment

unrelenting headaches

erratic behavior

decreased sexual function

***How does cocaine use lead to addiction?***

As with other drugs, repeated use of cocaine can cause long-term changes in the brain’s reward circuit and other systems, which may lead to addiction. The reward circuit eventually adapts to the excess dopamine brought on by the drug. As a result, people take stronger and more frequent doses to achieve the same high and feel relief from initial withdrawal.

***Treatment and recovery***

Depending on the level of use or addiction, there are various forms of treatment and recovery methods available to assist individuals. If you or someone you know is struggling with cocaine or other drug addiction, please consider visiting your campus wellness office or counseling center.

If you would like to search other options in your area, visit [www.drugabuse.com](http://www.drugabuse.com) or call their toll-free hotline at 877-969-2063.

