

Cocaine: It Drains the Brain

SUBSTANCE USE CONVERSATION STARTER

Cocaine is a powerful and addictive stimulant that can have serious effects on the brain and body, including addiction, mental health challenges and even life-threatening harm. Having a conversation about drug prevention allows you to educate yourself and support sisters in making healthy decisions. Use this conversation starter to help guide you in talking openly about substance use and misuse in your chapter.

CHAPTER DISCUSSION

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. 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.

Cocaine can be cut with fentanyl*, and individuals can be exposed to it without their knowledge. Fentanyl's high potency suggests that even low doses can stop breathing and significantly increase the risk of a fatal overdose.

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.

To search other options in your area, visit www.drugabuse.com or call their toll-free hotline at 877-969-2063.

*WHAT IS FENTANYL?

Fentanyl (classified as a Schedule II controlled substance) is a potent synthetic opioid that is used medically for pain management, particularly in cases of severe pain. However, it is now being illegally manufactured by drug cartels and used to contaminate the illicit drug supply. It is significantly more powerful than other opioids, such as morphine and heroin, with an estimated potency 50 to 100 times greater than morphine. Like other opioid drugs, it can also act in the brainstem to slow or stop breathing.

Fentanyl's high potency means that even a very small amount can cause an overdose.

- Illicitly manufactured fentanyl has become a major public health concern. Because drug cartels mix fentanyl into other substances, such as heroin, cocaine and counterfeit medications, individuals using these substances may become exposed to fentanyl without their knowledge.

- Symptoms of fentanyl overdose include severe drowsiness, slow or shallow breathing, pinpoint pupils, cold and clammy skin, and loss of consciousness. Naloxone (Narcan®) can reverse the effects of fentanyl overdose if administered promptly. However, due to fentanyl's potency, multiple doses of naloxone may be necessary.

RESPONDING TO AN OVERDOSE

If you think someone has overdosed, it's crucial to act quickly and calmly.

1. CHECK RESPONSIVENESS AND ASK QUESTIONS:

- If responsive, ask the person: “Are you OK?” “Have you been drinking or taking anything?” “What drugs or medications have you taken?” Look around for different substances or drug paraphernalia.
- If they don't respond, check for signs of breathing and a pulse. Try to wake them by calling their name or shaking them gently.

2. CALL 9-1-1.

3. ADMINISTER NALOXONE** (IF AVAILABLE):

- Naloxone is a safe medication – it should be given even if you are not sure if the overdose is from opioids or other drugs, especially since the individual may have been exposed to fentanyl without their knowledge.
- Administer naloxone according to the instructions. If the person does not breathe on their own within 2-3 minutes, give another dose of naloxone if available.
- Naloxone can reverse the effects of opioid overdoses, but it does not restore breathing if the overdose involves a non-opioid drug. Also, any reversal is temporary – naloxone will typically wear off in 30-90 minutes. Therefore, always call 9-1-1 to ensure the person receives the help they need.

4. PERFORM CPR (IF NECESSARY):

- If the person is not breathing or has no pulse, begin CPR immediately. Push hard and fast in the center of the chest until emergency help arrives. If you're trained in rescue breathing, you can incorporate it, but chest compressions are the priority.

5. POSITION THE PERSON:

- If the person is breathing but not fully awake, place them in the recovery position (place individual on their left side with their arms under their head, bending their right leg to prevent them from rolling onto their stomach).
- The recovery position is designed to prevent suffocation if the individual vomits.

6. STAY WITH THE INDIVIDUAL UNTIL HELP ARRIVES.

****NALOXONE TRAINING FOR CHAPTERS**

On March 29, 2023, the Food and Drug Administration authorized naloxone delivered as a nasal spray (brand name Narcan®) to be sold over the counter. With this approval, naloxone has become readily available on college campuses as well as from big-box chains, vending machines, supermarkets, convenience stores and gas stations.

Naloxone (Narcan®) is a legal substance. Any member should be able to have naloxone if needed for themselves or others within the facility or at events. If your chapter wishes to or has conducted a naloxone training for your chapter members, here are things to consider:

- Members and chapter leadership should focus on education, prevention and campus resources as they relate to naloxone.
- There are many campus and community resources that provide education and distribution of naloxone, and individuals can and should utilize those services.
- Attendance at a naloxone training should not be a requirement nor an expectation of members or new members. Participation is an individual's choice.
- Chapter leadership should always reinforce seeking immediate medical attention and calling 9-1-1 for the safety and well-being of members and guests.
- Members should know about Good Samaritan policies/laws of the state and college/university and be aware of their local resources.
- Check out this [educational video](#) produced by The Ohio State University for more information on identifying and coordinating a naloxone training.

SOURCES:

- Drug Enforcement Agency and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration's [Opioid Overdose Prevention Toolkit](#)
- The Ohio State University, Opioid Overdose Prevention and Response