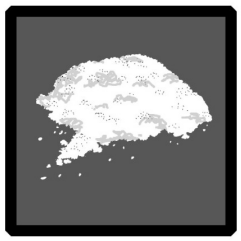
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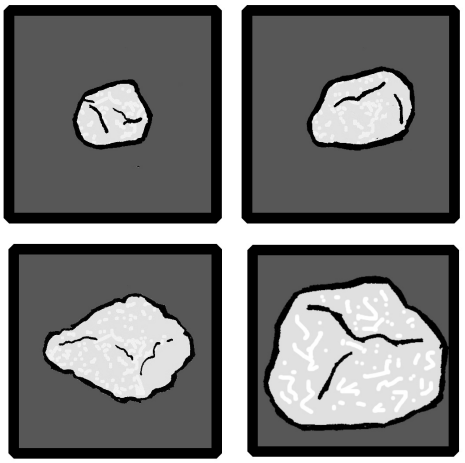


Crack Cocaine Harm Reduction Guide

Introduction to Cocaine and crack

Cocaine is a powerful short acting stimulant. Powder cocaine can be snorted or injected. It can also be “washed up” in a bicarbonate of soda and water solution or in liquid ammonia. This converts the cocaine into a pure smokable form – freebase cocaine. Putting cocaine in a bicarb water solution in a microwave also results in high quality freebase cocaine. When cocaine and bicarb are moistened without enough liquid and put in the microwave then the salt biproduct doesn’t dissolve in solution. The biproduct binds into the rock and bulks it up so you get a shiny low-quality rock that can be hard like a sugar cube.

1. Dose and frequency of use



Crack has an intense effect because smoking in a pipe sends a high dose of cocaine to your brain very quickly. The higher you go up the harder you come down resulting in a strong urge to quickly use again. Managing your dose is important for your health and supports self-management. Having clear rules that set boundaries for your using session helps you stay in control.

Harm reduction tips

- Starting to use crack later in the day means you can use going to bed as a natural break to your session
- Break your rock into smaller doses
- Pause between doses and use the cocaine energy to chat to friends or undertake activities
- Freebase cocaine can be smoked on silver foil delivering lower dose of cocaine which builds less intensely. This can lead to a pattern of smoking that has less hard peaks and crashes and some find this easier to self-regulate.
- Wait for half an hour after finishing your rock before deciding if you want to use more
- If you leave your bank card at home or with someone you trust at the start of a using session this can protect against burning through all your money. You can also just take out the cash you want to spend in a session.

Crack cocaine is a very moreish drug and taking too much can damage your heart and increase your risk of a stroke or a mental health crisis. It can also blow your money. Plan ahead so you have the required kit helps you apply harm reduction. Setting rules and developing rituals helps you be in control of your crack.

Come Down

Wrapping up a using session is a key moment in self-management. Having a ritual when you come to the end of a session helps you reinforce that the using is over for today and it's time to wind down and stop. Some people use heroin, benzos, alcohol or cannabis to help them chill and calm.

Harm reduction tips

- Have your own come down ritual that helps you wind down and stop.
- If you use heroin, benzos, alcohol or cannabis to wind down then make sure you have these at the start of a session. Trying to buy once you're pranged is not fun and the risk is that you'll buy more crack if you find this first.
- Make sure you have access to Naloxone and that people around you know how to use it.

2. Pipes and paraphernalia



Choice of pipe

There are lots of different types of pipes used for smoking crack cocaine. Pipes made from tin cans, plastic bottles and plastic inhalers are convenient but can release harmful fumes when heated. The use of cigarette ash to suspend the crack causes particularly bad lung damage. Metal cannabis pipes, metal bolts and very short pipes can burn the lips and mouth, also leading to lung damage through breathing in hot vapour / fumes. Pipes using stainless steel scrubber are better than ash but there is a risk that brittle pieces of metal will become detached and burn the mouth or become lodged in the lungs. Commercial glass pipes can be fragile and break easily adding to the risk of lip damage.

Harm reduction tips

- Use a heat-resistant glass pipe with a gauze that suspends the crack – no ash and no plastic fumes
- If you use pieces of stainless-steel scrubber as a gauze, then change it frequently. Watch out for repeatedly heating and cooling the gauze as it becomes brittle and bits break off.
- Replace your pipe if it has sharp broken edges
- Let your pipe cool before you take the next hit

- Remember that your mouth and throat can be numbed by the local anaesthetic effect of cocaine – look out for burns the next day and think how you could reduce this harm another time.

Risk Reference Table

- Cigarette ash – ash gets in your lungs – asthma, COPD – last resort, make your personal pipe a non-ash pipe
- Heated plastics – plastic bottles, asthma inhaler casings, or methadone bottles give off cancer forming fumes when heated – last resort, avoid repeatedly reheating
- Metal scrubber – becomes brittle and flakes can burn mouth and enter lungs, best homemade option – brush off pieces after cutting and replace frequently
- Burns to face, mouth and lungs – short stems and metal stems increases risk of burns from lighters, heat transfer or hot fumes – longer stems, glass pipes, avoid fierce lighters
- Sharing blood / saliva – sharing pipes means sharing low level flu and cold viruses and potentially hepatitis C – keep your pipe personal

Injecting Cocaine and Crack



Rapid repeated patterns of injecting common with cocaine can get bloody and makes it easy to run out of sterile syringes. When you inject cocaine, it numbs the area surrounding the vein and this makes it difficult to feel what you are doing when you inject again. Injecting crack can lead to vein damage – because of the extra citric or vit C is needed to prepare it, as well as frequent injecting. Too much acid in your drug solution hurts and leads to vein collapse.

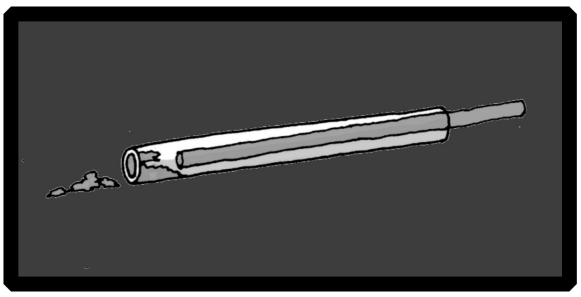
Harm reduction tips

- Stock up on a plentiful supply of sterile needles and syringes
- If possible, alternate your veins. This can help injecting sites heal and allows the numbing effect to wear off.
- Use a heat-resistant pipe to smoke crack as an alternative to injecting for some or all of the time.
- If snowballing – consider ‘Pin and Pipe’. Injecting heroin and then smoking your crack in a pipe can provide a similarly intense effect while reducing impact on your veins.

Recycle

Crack smoke leaves behind a white residue known as “recycle”. It’s hard to get the recycle out of homemade pipes and the recycle gets mixed up with bits of plastic and cigarette ash. Scraping glass pipes with metal rods or screwdrivers flakes pieces of glass into the recycle.

Harm reduction tips

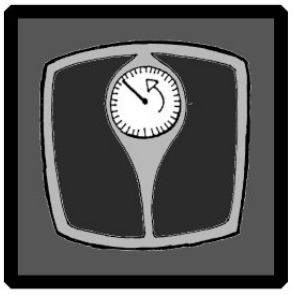


- Use a heat-resistant glass pipe with a wooden pokey stick that can push the hot steel gauze through the pipe collecting up the recycle, which can then be smoked from the other end of the pipe
- The wooden pokey stick can also be used to loosen the recycle inside the pipe.
- It's good to clean out you pipe once you've removed the recycle. You can flush with soapy water and push a tissue through with the pokey stick. Or not can push alcohol wipes through the pipe with a pokey stick and use them to clean the pipe and mouth piece.

3. Washing Up

Recommend use of bicarb over ammonia. The risk of inhaling ammonia fumes is a health concern. Some people will favour ammonia use and in this case encourage ventilation.

4. Changes in weight and sleep



Energy

Using crack cocaine places extra demands on the body so the body burns off more energy. Cocaine supresses your appetite so you will be less interested in eating and may even find it hard to eat.

Before a using session take on board slow burning carbohydrates like potatoes or pasta or noodles. These will give you energy over a using session.

During a using session take on board energy as you can (yogurts, milkshakes or sugary drinks).





Sleep

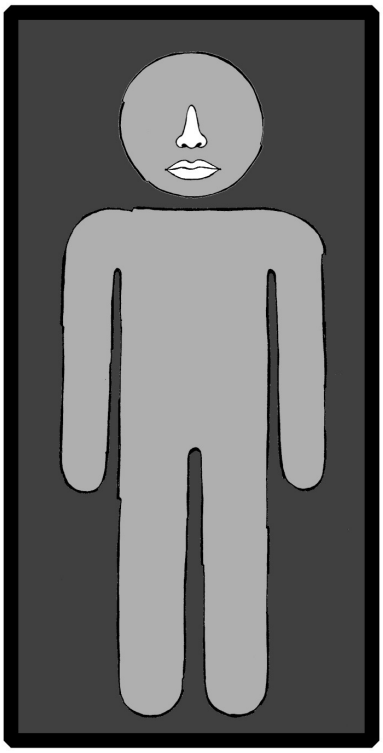
Sleep is key to helping your mind and body go through important maintenance functions. You will quickly become stretched and unwell if you don't sleep on a sustained basis.

Try and keep to a pattern of lying down in a darkened room every 24 hours so you can close your eyes and allow your body to rest. Relax and breathe. Sleep may come!

The precariousness of homelessness is one reason some people who use crack stay awake and alert. Finding a safe space to sleep is an important step.

Cold weather – is there a cold weather alert? Advise about night shelters.

5. Physical Health



Hydration, lip care and infections

When you take cocaine, your body heats up and sweats to cool down. Signs of dehydration are thirst, dry mouth, headaches, dizziness, fainting, lower back pain (sore kidneys) or dark yellow urine. Your lips become cracked when you are dehydrated, and this gets worse with hot pipes and vapours if your pipe is made of metal, is short in length or if you use a fierce flame. There is concern that pipe sharing when you have cracked and bloody lips can lead to hepatitis C transmission and many people who share pipes report sharing cold sores, cold or flu viruses.

Harm reduction tips

- Keep your pipe personal! Using your own pipe avoids the risk of sharing cold sores, cold and flu viruses, and possibly also hepatitis C.
- Drink lots of water to remain hydrated.
- Use a longer pipe and a lower flame to reduce inhaling hot vapour.
- Use lip salve to protect your lips – this can reduce cracks and cuts.
- Use mouth pieces or plastic tips if you share your pipe.

Risk Reference Table

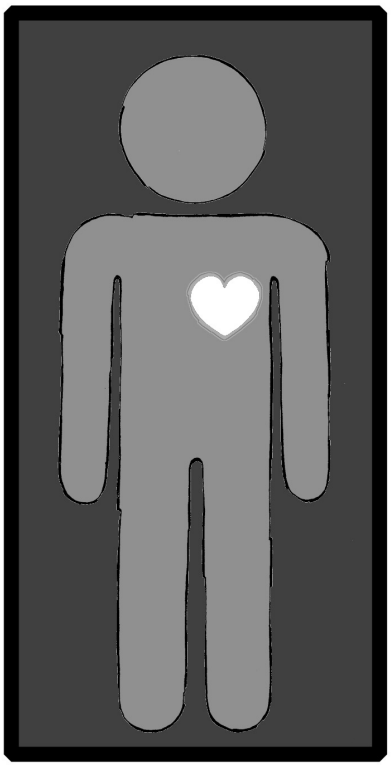
- Burns, blisters, and cuts to mouth or lips – hydrate, use longer stem, lipsalve
- Nose burns – use longer stem, avoid fierce lighters, keep clean and apply Vit E oil to promote healing
- Sores on fingers – use automaic lighters, slow down use
- Skin picking – reduce frequency and dose of crack, keep clean and covered, learn calming breath
- Injecting site injuries

6. Lung capacity

Many people who smoke crack cocaine can have bronchial infections, asthma and in the long-term COPD - chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. COPD can really impact your quality of life, making it difficult to get around and breathe freely. Signs of COPD include difficulty breathing, a rattly chest, wheezing, regular chest infections, and coughing up phlegm or blood. While COPD is a serious and progressive lung condition, early diagnosis can help prevent it getting worse and allows for symptom management. It's a good idea to talk to your drug worker or GP if you are having any symptoms and seek help urgently if you are coughing up blood.

While smoking crack is not great for lung health, there are things you can do to make it safer. Use a pipe, ideally heat-resistant glass, that won't release fumes. Using a pipe that doesn't require ash is a good start. If you are coughing up lots of black phlegm after a session, then switching to a pipe that doesn't use ash would be kinder to your lungs.

7. Heart screening.



Taking one off high doses of cocaine can trigger an acute heart malfunction. Such heart attacks are often reversal but it can lead to damage to the heart and its vessels and arteries and leave the person more vulnerable to a stroke or clot.

Long term heavy use of cocaine do longer term damage to the structure of the heart. Over time this can make someone vulnerable to chronic heart failure.

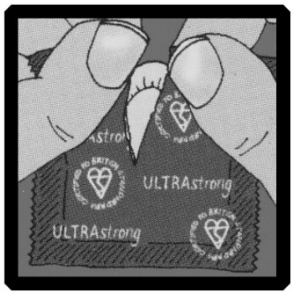
Remember taking crack and cocaine and alcohol together with alcohol leads to cocaethylene, which is toxic to the heart.

Harm reduction tips

- Reduce your doses, pause between doses and have days off
- Stay hydrated and keep your body cool
- Think about other factors that affect your heart health – exercise, eat well, sleep, tobacco harm reduction
- The most common signs of a heart attack are:
    - sudden and persisting pain or discomfort in the chest that feels like pressure, tightness or squeezing
    - the pain may spread to either arm, the neck, jaw, back or stomach
    - you may also feel sick, sweaty, light-headed or short of breath.

If someone is having a heart attack, ring 999 and call ambulance. This is a medical emergency and the speed of the response is critical.

8. Sexual health





Cocaine can cause intense, boundary breaking sex. Cocaine and crack can lead to intense sexual experiences and people report having the confidence to try new experiences. In a respectful and caring relationship cocaine can be part of exploring new experiences. It is important to understand the boundary breaking effects of cocaine so that consent can be openly discussed and redlines can be agreed while straight.

Symptoms of a sexually transmitted infection (STI) can include:

- an unusual discharge from your vagina, penis or anus
- pain when peeing
- lumps or skin growths around your genitals or bottom (anus)
- a rash
- unusual vaginal bleeding

- itchy genitals or anus
- blisters, sores or warts around your genitals or anus
- warts in your mouth or throat, but this is very rare

Why is it good to test for sexually transmitted infections?

Early Detection: Find hidden infections like chlamydia or gonorrhoea early, even if you have no symptoms.
Simple Cures: Treat most common bacterial STIs quickly with a basic course of antibiotics.
Prevent Complications: Avoid long-term health damage, such as chronic pelvic pain or infertility.
Manage Long-Term Conditions: Access vital management and medication for viral infections like HIV.
Stop Transmission: Protect your sexual partners and reduce overall infection rates in the community.
How to find your local sexual health clinic which are free and confidential

How to use a condom

Put the condom on before you start having sex (before the penis touches the vagina or anus).

1. Make sure the penis is fully erect.
2. Open the packet carefully so you do not damage the condom. Do not use your teeth as this could rip the condom.
3. Hold the tip of the condom to squeeze out any air.
4. Roll the condom all the way down to the base of the penis. If the condom does not roll down, you may have put it on the wrong way round. Throw it away and use a new condom.
5. Keep the condom on until you finish having sex. When you've finished, grip the base of the condom as you pull out to stop it coming off the penis.
6. Always put used condoms in the bin, not in the toilet.

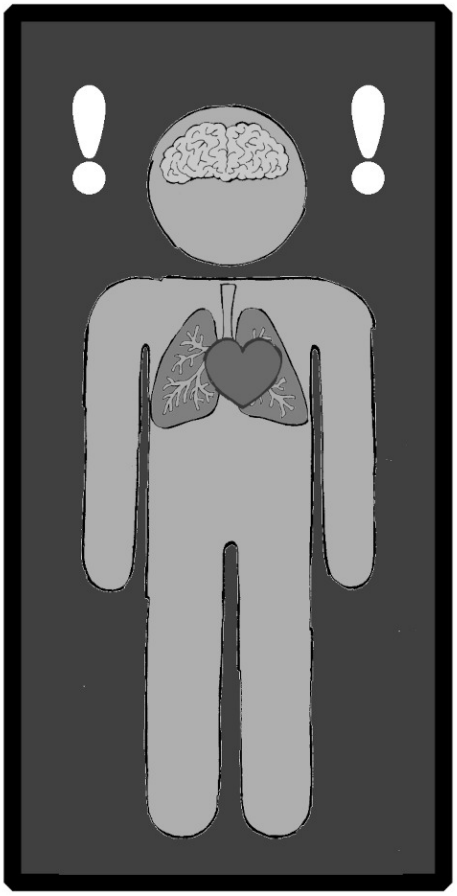
9. Mental Health



Taking too much cocaine for too long and not taking breaks to sleep can stretch your mind and body to breaking point. This can lead to drug induced psychosis where you hear and less commonly see things that are not there. You can be paranoid and have distorted thinking. This can be scary. The symptoms usually stop when you stop taking crack cocaine and other stimulants and eat, hydrate, rest and sleep.

Listening to people you trust can help you orientate yourself when you are spinning out. Taking more crack cocaine will likely increase the symptoms and make them last for longer.

Regular food with protein is also good for the body and can help reduce the intensity of the come down. Chicken and turkey breast, fish and seafood, lean red meats, eggs and diary products are all examples of foods high in protein. Tofu, tempeh and edamame beans are all examples of soy products containing high protein. Lentils, chickpeas, beans, nuts, and seeds are further protein options. Sun and exercise also help. Remember is takes a few days for mood to rebalance after use and this can take weeks or months with heavy use.
If you experience on-going mental health issues or suicidal thoughts, then your drugs or health worker can help you discuss access to counselling and local support services. Discuss access to crisis support. Samaritans call 116 123



10. Attitudes to future use

Negotiate positive change plan with the client to focus on areas of concern or interest. You don't need to tackle all issues in one session. The Crack Cocaine Health Check can help you identify and prioritise areas of concern to work on over key working sessions or on an ad hoc basis alongside drop in visits.