Cocaine Addiction

Cocaine is known as a party drug – an “upper” used in nightclub bathrooms across the world. But behind the glitz and glam reputation that cocaine enjoys, cocaine addiction can have serious and long-lasting effects on those that suffer.

The media usually paints cocaine as either a white powder snorted by high flying finance guys, or “crack” rocks smoked by some of the most disadvantaged in society. The truth though is that cocaine can be snorted, injected, and smoked by a wide range of members of society. Not everyone goes on to become addicted, but addiction can have devastating effects on those that do.

So How Addictive is Cocaine?

Cocaine is a schedule II narcotic in the USA, as classified by the DEA, meaning it has a high potential for abuse. It's difficult to put a figure to exactly how addictive cocaine is, but when attempts have been made cocaine (crack cocaine in particular) often features high up on the list alongside alcohol, heroin, and methamphetamine.

When someone takes cocaine, it acts as a powerful stimulant to give an intense “high”. This high is very quick to come on, and typically only lasts for 30-60 minutes. Once this wears off, the user often takes cocaine again to get back to the high. Over the course of a night, this can lead to someone using cocaine as much as 10 times. Each hit of cocaine causes dopamine to build up in your brain. With frequent or repeated use of cocaine, you may experience longer term cravings, withdrawal symptoms, and a compulsion to continue using.
Some may become addicted to cocaine purely because they enjoy the party lifestyle and want to experience the high frequently while out. For others though, an addiction can form as a distraction from underlying emotions, to soothe pain and “treat” low moods and anxiety. Cocaine can become particularly problematic and unhealthy if the user continues to use cocaine as a self-soother, especially when combined with the changes to their brain’s chemistry which occur in addiction.

The Dangers of Cocaine Addiction

You might be considered to have cocaine dependence or addiction if you feel a compulsion to use or cannot stop using cocaine. Those with addiction often continue to misuse substances despite negative consequences on their health and lives in general.

Often cocaine addicts struggle to see that there is a problem with their cocaine use, as they might only see the short term “positives” – the euphoria, energy, and confidence that cocaine can provide. They may also experience withdrawal symptoms when not using cocaine, and therefore associate cocaine use with the reversal of these negative effects.

There are, however, many dangers of cocaine use in both the short and long term. If you think a friend or loved one is becoming addicted to cocaine, there are a few important signs and symptoms you can look out for.

Signs of cocaine addiction include:

- Mood swings and panic attacks
- Difficulty sleeping
- Anxiety and depression
- Agitation and restlessness
- Lying or secrecy around cocaine use
- Withdrawal symptoms such as irritability, fatigue, and paranoia

While “experienced” users of cocaine might feel that their cocaine use is safe, each time they take cocaine they are taking a risk. Cocaine in its powdered form can be cut with other substances without a change in its appearance, meaning you never quite know what you’re taking. Cocaine cut with fentanyl is particularly potent and carries a high risk of death.

Cocaine has several short-term effects, which can be particularly dangerous when mixed with other drugs or with alcohol. Alcohol, heroin, and opioids can all increase the toxicity of cocaine alongside some prescription medication like antidepressants and antipsychotics.

Short term dangers of cocaine use include:

- Heart attacks
- Stroke
- Sudden cardiac arrest
- Overdose

When used in the long term, cocaine can cause lasting damage to your vital organs. This is especially pronounced when someone is addicted to both cocaine and alcohol. When your liver processes both, a metabolite called cocaethylene is produced. This can prolong the time it takes for alcohol and cocaine to leave your system and produces a more harmful effect than using cocaine alone.
Long term dangers of cocaine use include:

- High blood pressure
- Increased risk of heart attack
- Increased risk of abnormal heart rhythms
- Liver and kidney damage
- Breathing problems
- Frequent nosebleeds

Treatment for Cocaine Addiction

Depending on the severity and circumstances of cocaine addiction, different treatment approaches might be considered. The first step to recovery is seeking professional help from your doctor or from someone who can give you advice on what services are available in your area.

If you suffer from **severe withdrawal symptoms**, you may need to undergo a cocaine detoxification. This can be done **at an addiction recovery center** either as a day treatment (visiting each day for treatment) or **residential rehab** (**staying at the recovery center for the duration of your detox**).

Even if your withdrawal symptoms aren't severe, it might be helpful to attend a **rehabilitation center**, either as an outpatient or a resident. Rehab can provide a safe space to explore why you became addicted, receive therapy to treat underlying emotional difficulties, and take part in therapeutic activities that teach you how to live without cocaine.

12 step programs such as Narcotics Anonymous are also a fantastic way to begin your recovery. These fellowship programs provide a space to listen to and speak about addiction related issues, get support from peers who understand what you are going through, and start the 12 steps to recovery.

**Conclusion**

Cocaine is a very addictive substance which when used both in the short and long term can have devastating effects on your health and lifestyle. Cocaine addicts often fail to see that their cocaine use is becoming a problem. Once a cocaine addict acknowledges that they have a problem, help is available through medical professionals, rehabilitation centers, and 12 step programs.