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COCAINE OR COCAINE HYDROCHLORIDE

Cocaine or 'coke' as it is commonly known, is a stimulant and has a similar effect to amphetamines like speed and ice, however, it produces a more intense effect and shorter 'high' depending upon dosage.

Cocaine hydrochloride can be further processed to produce cocaine base, which comes in two forms known as freebase and crack.

All three forms are highly addictive and can create serious physical and mental problems for a user.

Cocaine is known by a variety of other names, including: coke, Charlie, blow, C, pepsi, nose candy. Crack cocaine is also known by a variety of other names, including rock, base and sugar block.

Cocaine facts at a glance

The signs and symptoms of using cocaine can include:

- anxiety
- increased heart rate
- aggression
- dilated pupils
- chest pain
- overheating and sweating
- nose bleeds
- paranoia
- lethargy
- agitation
- hallucinations
- reduced appetite
- muscle twitches
- tremors
- nausea and vomiting.

The consequences of using cocaine may include:

- depression
- dependence
- nasal and sinus congestion
- cardiomyopathy
- cocaine psychosis
- ulceration of the mucous membrane of the nose
- violent or erratic behaviour
- impaired sexual performance
- damage to the nasal septum
- cardiac arrest
- convulsions
- kidney failure
- stroke
- seizures
- high risk of dependence (addiction), especially if injected
- HIV and hepatitis infections through needle sharing.

Physical effects of using cocaine

When using cocaine, the rush experienced is actually the receptors in the brain being flooded with a neurochemical called dopamine. Because cocaine is tapping into the brain's 'reward system', users begin to crave more of it to experience the same pleasure again. This is the reason many users find the drug to be so addictive.

Problems using cocaine

In the short term, cocaine can produce increased heart rate, paranoia, agitation, dilated pupils, hallucinations, tremors, muscle twitches, nausea and vomiting. The immediate effects of the drug can intensify when it's taken in larger quantities, and can produce an irregular heartbeat, chest pain, hyperthermia, seizures or stroke.

When you snort cocaine, you can damage your nasal membranes and septum. In rare cases this can lead to its eventual collapse. Injecting cocaine can cause severe vasoconstriction, a condition that prevents blood flowing to tissue, resulting in severe tissue damage.

Some people have cocaine binges, where they take the drug repetitively over several hours or days. The binge is then followed by the 'crash', with the user experiencing feelings of intense depression, lethargy and hunger.

Using large quantities of cocaine frequently or over a long period of time can also lead to cocaine psychosis. This is characterised by paranoid delusions, hallucinations and bizarre, aggressive or violent behaviour. These symptoms usually stop a few days after the user has taken cocaine, but in some cases require further medical treatment.

As well as cocaine psychosis, long-term users also face the potential problems of eating and sleeping disorders, impaired sexual performance, ongoing respiratory problems, convulsions, kidney failure and are at an increased risk of experiencing a stroke. Sharing needles to inject drugs greatly increases the risk of contracting hepatitis B, hepatitis C and HIV.

Using cocaine in combination with alcohol can also be dangerous. When the two are mixed the body produces a substance in the blood called cocaethylene, which can be more toxic than cocaine alone.

Mixing drugs causes additional problems. For example, using heroin and cocaine at the same time affects the part of the brain that controls breathing, causing the respiratory system to labour and increasing the risk of the user falling into a coma.



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ECSTASY OR METHYLENEDIOSYMMETHAMPHETAMINE (MDMA)

Methylenedioxyamphetamine (MDMA) is supposed to be the primary ingredient in most ecstasy tablets, but as the ingredients required to make synthetic drugs are becoming more difficult to obtain, the formulation of pills marketed as ecstasy can vary greatly. They are more likely to contain methamphetamine (speed) combined with a synthetic hallucinogen or para-methoxyamphetamine (PMA).

Ecstasy is known by a variety of other names, including E, pills, Ex, pingers, E n C, eccy, MDMA, XTC, eggs and disco biscuits.

Ecstasy facts at a glance

The signs and symptoms of using ecstasy can include:

- increased blood pressure and pulse rate
- dilated pupils
- raised body temperature
- sweating
- loss of appetite
- jaw clenching
- nausea
- nervousness
- confusion
- teeth grinding
- vomiting
- hallucinations
- tremors
- insomnia
- panic
- visual distortions.

The consequences of using ecstasy may include:

- chronic sleep problems
- cracked teeth through grinding
- high blood pressure
- dehydration
- anxiety
- decreased emotional control
- lethargy
- severe depression
- memory impairment
- nerve cell damage
- serotonin syndrome
- death from heart failure
- rhabdomyolysis – overheating to the point of organs liquefying.

Physical effects of ecstasy

The MDMA or other stimulants in ecstasy are actually speeding up the activity in the central nervous system. Where hallucinogens are present the drug can also affect perception, causing things to appear distorted, or the user may hear or see things that don't actually exist.

There are usually three phases experienced when taking ecstasy:

Coming up – the user may experience tightening of muscles, especially in the jaw, dilated pupils, visual distortions, nausea or vomiting, strong pulse, increased temperature, confusion and panic.

Plateauing – where the user may experience feeling happy, more awake, relaxed, open, confident, talkative and have decreased urine output and increased thirst.

Coming down – the user can feel physically exhausted, depressed, anxious, paranoid, irritable and unable to sleep. The comedown will be more intense if they have taken other drugs, including alcohol.

Problems from using ecstasy

In the short term, ecstasy can produce increased heart rate and blood pressure, overheating, jaw clenching, teeth grinding, tremors, nausea, enlarged pupils and anxiety.

Taking ecstasy in a hot or humid environment, like a dance party or nightclub, can also cause dehydration and raise the body's temperature to dangerous levels. This increases the risk of the body heating up to levels that cause organs to fail and breakdown and eventually the heart to stop.

There is also a risk of serotonin syndrome or toxicity, which is an excess of the neurotransmitter serotonin (a brain chemical). It typically results from mixing ecstasy with various, but not all, antidepressants or simply taking an overdose. The symptoms include agitation, confusion, headache, tachycardia (rapid heart rate), hypertension, hyperpyrexia (abnormally high fever) and muscle twitches. It can result in coma and death.

There are a number of psychological problems associated with ecstasy including the 'hangover effect', depression that can last for days after using ecstasy. This is because serotonin in the brain is reduced by ecstasy use. Research in animals shows that this serotonin loss is long lasting (up to three years) and may even be permanent.

There is a greater risk of physical and psychological harm as a result of taking ecstasy for those with the following conditions: heart disease, diabetes, epilepsy, liver problems, hypertension, panic attacks or a history of mental illness.

At this stage, longer-term effects of using ecstasy are inconclusive, but potential problems include cracked teeth through clenching and grinding, high blood pressure, memory and attention impairment, lethargy, decreased emotional control, severe depression and possible nerve cell damage.



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GHB OR GAMMA-HYDROXYBUTYRATE

GHB is a drug commonly found in the dance scene and is sometimes referred to as liquid ecstasy due to its stimulating, euphoric and supposed aphrodisiac qualities. Chemically-speaking, it is not related to ecstasy (MDMA) at all. Mildly salty in flavour, yet colourless and odorless, it's also used as a date-rape drug. When mixed with alcohol it can intoxicate quickly.

Other names include fantasy, grievous bodily harm (GBH), liquid ecstasy, liquid E, G.

GHB facts at a glance

The signs and symptoms of using GHB can include:

- drowsiness
- induced sleep
- nausea
- reduced inhibitions
- dizziness
- headache
- confusion and agitation.

The consequences of using GHB may include:

- extreme drowsiness/grogginess
- hallucinations
- difficulty focussing eyes
- vomiting
- impaired movement and speech
- reduced muscle tone
- disorientation
- convulsions/seizures
- coma
- respiratory distress
- slowed heart rate
- lowered blood pressure
- amnesia
- death
- can be addictive.

Physical effects of GHB

Gamma-hydroxybutyrate (GHB) is a depressant drug that contains a sedative and, at sufficient doses, has anaesthetic properties (that means it knocks you out). Depressant drugs slow down brain and central nervous system activity.

GHB has been identified as a 'date-rape drug' because it leaves users with amnesia, impaired movement and speech. It can be easily camouflaged in drinks as it is difficult to taste.

Problems using GHB

There's a very fine line between the amount of GHB required to get someone intoxicated and how much will put them in a coma. As there's no way of knowing the strength of the GHB, the chances of overdosing are very high. Combining GHB with other drugs also increases the dangers. For example, using GHB with other central nervous system depressants such as alcohol, Valium or heroin, increases the risk of overdosing significantly.



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ICE AND BASE

Ice and base are methamphetamines, part of the amphetamine family of drugs which also includes speed. Ice is the most pure form of methamphetamine, followed by base then speed. The 'high' experienced from ice and base is much more intense, and with intense reactions come powerful responses including comedown, the potential for dependence (addiction) and chronic physical and mental problems.

Ice is known by other names, including crystal meth, meth, crystal, shabu, batu, d-meth, tina and glass. Base is also known as speed dexedrine, dexies, dex, shad, go-ee, glass, tina, paste, oxblood, shabu, yabba and crank.

Ice and base facts at a glance

The signs and symptoms of using ice can include:

- increased heart and breathing rate
- trembling hands and fingers
- high blood pressure
- overheating and excessive sweating
- stomach cramps
- blurred vision
- bad headaches
- dizziness
- difficulty sleeping
- reduced appetite
- irritability and hostility
- hallucinations
- paranoia
- psychosis
- panic attacks
- violent or erratic behaviour
- itching, picking, scratching skin
- skin problems/lesions

The consequences of using ice may include:

- paranoia
- increased risk of stroke
- high risk of dependence (addiction)
- chronic sleep problems
- memory loss
- HIV and hepatitis infections through needle-sharing
- anorexia
- malnutrition
- heart and lung problems
- increased risk of kidney problems
- depression
- loss of ability to make decisions.

Physical effects of ice

When ice or base is used, the receptors in the brain are flooded with 'reward' chemicals. As more is taken, these receptors can be destroyed. Prolonged ice use can lead to a point when the user no longer feels pleasure without further ice use.

Anecdotal evidence from ice users is that the same intense 'high' is not achieved as readily after the first use. This means that a user needs to take more of the drug to replicate the same feeling.

Problems using ice

In the short term, ice or base use can produce increased heart rate, hypertension, irregular body temperature and increased breathing rate. It can also constrict blood vessels and cause heart problems.

Longer-term users of these drugs often look older than their age and may have damaged teeth and lesions on the skin. These users are at a greater risk of stroke, experience decreased lung function and develop poor cognitive functioning resulting in memory and decision making issues. Injecting can result in scarring, abscesses, vein damage and exposure to blood-borne viruses.

Studies have shown the use of ice and base is associated with brain and mental health conditions, including ruptured blood vessels in the brain, memory-loss, indecision, depression and psychosis. These drugs can cause paranoia and hallucinations and the user may also become aggressive and violent, possibly requiring sedation and physical restraint or police intervention.

Using ice or base can also lead to social and financial problems and the risk of family breakdown and losing friends.

Dependence on ice and base can be physical, psychological, or both.

People who are physically dependent on ice or base develop tolerance to the drug. This makes it necessary to take more of the drug to get the same effect. They can also find that their bodies have become used to functioning with the drug present. As a result users need to increase their dosage as they develop tolerance and require ice in their system to feel 'normal'.

People who are psychologically dependent on ice or base find that using these drugs becomes far more important than other activities in their lives. They crave these drugs and find it very difficult to stop using them.

If people who are dependent on ice suddenly stop taking it they will experience withdrawal symptoms because their bodies have to readjust to functioning without the drug. People may experience withdrawal symptoms for a couple of weeks.



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SPEED

Speed is part of the amphetamine family of drugs, which also includes ice. Ice is the purest form of the drug followed by base and then speed. However, the potential for dependence (addiction) and physical and mental problems from using speed is still high.

Speed is also known by a variety of other names, including whizz, go-ee, snow, zip, point, eve, gogo, pure, and gas.

Speed facts at a glance

The signs and symptoms of using speed can include:

- increased and irregular heart rate
- increased breathing
- teeth grinding
- nervousness
- restlessness
- insomnia
- aggression
- fever and sweating
- headaches
- blurred vision
- overheating
- dry mouth and lips
- dilated pupils
- nausea and vomiting
- mood swings
- hallucinations
- paranoia.

The consequences of using speed may include:

- chronic sleep problems
- cracked teeth through grinding
- panic attacks
- insomnia
- anxiety
- decreased emotional control
- severe depression
- violent behaviour
- speed psychosis
- nerve cell damage
- heart failure or stroke
- high risk of dependence (addiction), especially if injected
- HIV and hepatitis infections through needle sharing.

Physical effects of speed

Speed targets the brain's 'reward system' and users will often crave that feeling again, which can lead to addiction.

The sense of alertness and energy a person experiences is due to these drugs speeding up the messages between the brain and the body. This leads to an increased heart and breathing rate, and higher blood pressure.

Problems using speed

In the short term, speed use can produce increased and irregular heartbeat and breathing, excessive sweating, overheating, blurred vision, headaches, teeth grinding, jaw clenching, dilated pupils, nausea and diarrhoea. It can also lead to insomnia.

Long-term users also face the potential issues of dental problems (through teeth grinding), significant weight loss, stroke, heart problems and a high risk of dependence. Sharing needles to inject drugs greatly increases the risk of contracting hepatitis B, hepatitis C and HIV.

Research also shows that both verbal and physical violence are linked with long-term amphetamine use. Heavy binges on speed are associated with reckless and aggressive behaviour.

Users also face further psychological issues with prolonged amphetamine use, including attention and memory issues, decreased emotional control, paranoid delusions, hallucinations, mood swings and depression. This can lead to social and financial problems, the risk of family breakdown and losing friends.

One of the most common effects of amphetamine overdose is 'speed psychosis'. This closely resembles the effects of paranoid schizophrenia, and usually begins with a heightened awareness of the environment and feelings of paranoia, anxiety and tension.



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OTHER DRUGS (HALLUCINOGENS, KETAMINE AND HEROIN)

There is a wide variety of other dangerous drugs out there that are less commonly used than ecstasy or marijuana. These drugs include heroin, ketamine and hallucinogens like LSD, and psilocybin.

The effects of these drugs at a glance

Hallucinogens

Hallucinogens are also known by a variety of other names including acid, trips, wedges, windowpane, blotter, microdot, mushies, blue meanies, magic mushrooms, and gold tops.

The signs and symptoms of using hallucinogens:

- trance-like state
- excitation
- euphoria
- increased pulse rate
- insomnia
- hallucinations
- paranoia.

The consequences of using hallucinogens may include:

- anxiety
- self-inflicted injury
- unpredictable flashbacks.
- violent behaviour
- paranoia
- depression
- confusion and lack of coordination can result in greater risk of injury
- visual hallucinations may produce anxiety and fear

Ketamine (Ketamine hydrochloride)

Ketamine is also known as green, K, super K, special K, and vitamin K.

The signs and symptoms of using ketamine can include:

- altered perception
- disorientation
- drowsiness
- hallucinations
- numbness
- strange muscle movements
- nausea
- vomiting.

The consequences of using ketamine may include:

- accidents from lack of coordination
- quick development of tolerance
- psychological dependence
- psychosis
- flashbacks
- loss of memory
- attention and vision impairment.

As ketamine is an anaesthetic, when used with depressant drugs such as alcohol, heroin or tranquillisers it can be particularly harmful as it has the potential to cause vital organs such as the lungs or heart to stop functioning.

Heroin

Heroin is one of a group of drugs known as “opioids”. Other opioids include opium, morphine, codeine, pethidine, oxycodone, buprenorphine and methadone. Heroin and other opioids are depressants. Depressants do not necessarily make you feel depressed. Rather, they slow down the activity of the central nervous system and messages going to and from the brain and the body.

Heroin is known by a variety of other names, including horse, hammer, H, dope, smack, junk, gear and boy.

The signs and symptoms of using heroin can include:

- confusion
- decreased blood pressure and heart rate
- dry mouth
- slurred/slow speech
- reduced coordination
- nausea and vomiting
- suppressed cough reflex
- reduced sexual urges
- lethargy
- drowsiness
- constipation
- constricted pupils
- slowed breathing.

The consequences of using heroin may include:

- high risk of addiction
- mood swings
- depression
- menstrual irregularity and infertility in women
- loss of sex drive in men
- anxiety disorders
- chronic constipation
- infection at the site of injections
- HIV and hepatitis infections through needle sharing
- non-fatal overdose
- death from overdose.

Physical effects of heroin

A central nervous system depressant, heroin actually slows down the brain functions, in particular the control of breathing, which can slow down or even stop. At the same time blood pressure and body temperature drops and the heartbeat can become irregular.

Problems using heroin

Most heroin is mixed with other substances like glucose, caffeine, sugar and paracetamol, which can cause the end product to be highly poisonous.

In the short term, injecting heroin can result in skin, heart and lung infections, and increases the risk of blood-borne diseases like hepatitis B, hepatitis C and HIV when sharing needles.

Accidental overdoses are also common, as it is almost impossible for users to tell the purity of the heroin they are using. Overdoses can also happen if too much heroin is injected or it is used in combination with alcohol or other drugs.

Long-term problems can include constipation, irregular periods and infertility in women, loss of sex drive in men, mood swings, depression, and memory impairment.

Other long-term problems can result from users neglecting their general health, being affected by drug impurities and contaminants, and contracting blood borne viruses. Where impurities and contaminants are present in heroin this can lead to collapsed veins, tetanus, abscesses and damage to the heart, liver, lungs and brain.

Women using heroin while pregnant also face a variety of complications. These can include problems with foetal development, increased risk of miscarriage or premature birth, babies being born smaller than average (low birth weight) and the baby being prone to illness.

When taken, heroin can pass through the placenta into the foetus, with the baby experiencing heroin withdrawal after birth. If a mother continues to use heroin while breastfeeding, the drug may be present in breast milk and damage the baby's health.

Dependence on heroin

People who are physically dependent on heroin can develop a tolerance to the drug. This means more is required to get the same 'rush', eventually leading to a 'dose plateau' where no amount of the drug is enough. Users can also find that their body has become used to functioning with the drug present.

People who are psychologically dependent on heroin find that using it becomes far more important than other activities in their lives. They crave the drug and will find it very difficult to stop using it, or even reduce the amount they use.

If dependent people suddenly stop taking heroin, or drastically reduce the amount they use, they will experience withdrawal symptoms as their bodies readjust to functioning without the drug. Symptoms usually appear within few hours after the last dose, getting stronger and peaking around two to four days later.

Withdrawal symptoms usually subside after six to seven days, but some symptoms such as chronic depression, anxiety, insomnia, loss of appetite, agitation and a continued craving for heroin may last for months and even years.



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MARIJUANA (CANNABIS)

Marijuana comes from the cannabis plant (*cannabis sativa*). The main active ingredient is 'delta-9 tetrahydrocannabinol' (THC). The cannabis plant is also used to produce hashish (hash) and hash oil. Of the three, marijuana (*cannabis*) is the most common and least powerful but is still capable of causing a variety of physical and mental problems resulting from intoxication and long-term use.

Marijuana is known by a variety of other names, including: pot, grass, weed, ya(r)ndi, rope, mull, dope, skunk, bhang, ganja, hash, chronic, reefer, joint, cone or spliff.

Marijuana facts at a glance

The signs and symptoms of using marijuana can include:

- slow thinking
- slow reflexes
- reduced coordination
- problems concentrating
- reduced motivation
- dilated pupils
- blood shot or glassy eyes
- dryness of the mouth
- increased appetite
- mood swings
- panic attacks
- anxiety and paranoia
- psychosis
- hallucinations
- delusions.

The consequences of using marijuana may include:

- dependence
- anxiety and depression
- sleep problems
- lowered sex drive
- learning difficulties and poorer educational outcomes
- memory problems
- respiratory illnesses such as chronic cough and bronchitis
- increased risk of cancer of the lung, mouth, throat and tongue
- paranoia and other psychotic symptoms such as hallucinations with increased risk of developing schizophrenia.

Physical effects of using marijuana

Where marijuana is used, the chemical THC is absorbed into the bloodstream, through the lungs (if smoked) or through the lining of the stomach or intestines (if eaten). The bloodstream carries the THC to the brain, flooding the receptors with the brain's reward chemicals and producing the 'high' effect.

Problems from using marijuana

In the short term using marijuana can lead to difficulty concentrating, impaired motor skills, slow reflexes, reduced coordination, bloodshot or glassy eyes and dryness of the mouth.

Longer term, users face the physical problems of increased risk of respiratory illnesses including chronic bronchitis and lung, mouth, throat and tongue cancers. Marijuana can also affect reproductive function, including lowered sex drive and sperm count for males, irregular menstrual cycles for females and low birth weight babies. THC crosses the placenta and is also secreted in breast milk.

Marijuana has also been shown to pose serious potential risks to mental health. Problems can include memory loss, learning difficulties, mood swings, paranoia, anxiety, decreased motivation, hallucinations, dependence, psychosis and psychotic symptoms, and suicidal thoughts. Marijuana use can also lead to a deterioration in the condition of people with pre-existing mental illnesses and symptoms of schizophrenia.

As well as the serious physical and mental problems that marijuana use can cause, it can also lead to social and financial problems, poorer educational outcomes and the breakdown of relationships with family and friends.

Problems associated with marijuana use are more common in those who first use it at an early age and use higher doses for longer periods of time.

Dependence on marijuana

When someone uses marijuana regularly they usually develop a tolerance for the drug. This means they have to use more to get the same effect as their brain has become used to functioning with the drug present.

One of the main symptoms of marijuana dependence is a loss of control over use. People crave the drug and find it difficult to stop using it.

If a person is dependent on marijuana (cannabis) and suddenly stops using it, they usually experience withdrawal symptoms, as their body readjusts to functioning without the drug. These symptoms usually last for less than a week, although people experience difficulties with concentration, memory and learning, as well as problems sleeping.