



Cocaine

It's Not a Party Drug

Cocaine use among college students remains a serious concern for many reasons. Perhaps most concerning is how misunderstood the drug is. While TV shows and movies such as *Narcos*, *Scarface*, and *Blow* tend to glorify the drug, the truth is that cocaine is no joke. In addition to being expensive and illegal, cocaine use can cause significant short and long-term negative health effects. So, ask yourself: Is a 20-minute high really worth it? Use this guide to lead a discussion about the effects of using cocaine, and the potential financial, legal, and health-related consequences that come along with its use.

What Is Cocaine?

Cocaine is a powerfully addictive stimulant drug made from the coca plant, which is native to South America. However, cocaine purchased from street dealers today is rarely “pure,” and is often mixed with additives such as cornstarch, talcum powder or flour to increase profits. 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.” As with other drugs, the reward circuit eventually adapts to the excess dopamine and as a result, people need to take stronger and more frequent doses to achieve the same “high.” This can quickly lead to a serious dependency or addiction.

What are some potential dangers associated with using cocaine that has been “cut” with other unknown substances?

Side Effects of Using Cocaine

There are numerous health-related side effects associated with cocaine use. Both the short-term and long-term side effects can lead to more severe problems down the road — such as heart attacks, overdoses, and death. Below are some common side effects:

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

With these side effects in mind, how do you think cocaine use would affect your daily life? What effect might they have on your academics or social life long-term?

Resource adapted from Zeta Tau Alpha’s “*Cocaine: It’s Not a Party Drug*” Conversation Starter

Is it Worth It?

In addition to the side effects mentioned above, it is also important to remember that first and foremost, cocaine is **illegal**. The DEA classifies cocaine as a Schedule II drug. Schedule II drugs are defined as drugs with a high potential for abuse, with use potentially leading to severe psychological or physical dependence. Examples of other Schedule II drugs include methamphetamine, OxyContin, and Vicodin. In all cases, possession of cocaine is considered a felony, with the higher the weight resulting in the higher the degree of a felony an individual can be charged with. Legal consequences aside, cocaine is also extremely expensive. According to the Global Drug Survey, the average cost of a gram of cocaine in the US is \$62. There is no such thing as “casual” cocaine use. When you use cocaine, you are taking a serious risk on many levels. Considering the “high” from cocaine lasts for roughly 20 minutes, is it really worth it?

What are some additional consequences that are associated with cocaine use? How do you think a felony cocaine charge would affect your undergraduate experience? How about as a post-graduate?

If you or someone you know is struggling with cocaine or other drug addiction, please consider visiting your campus wellness officer or counseling center. If you would like to search other options in your area, visit www.drugabuse.com or call their toll-free hotline at 877-969-2063.

Resources

NATIONAL INSTITUTE ON DRUG ABUSE

[HTTPS://WWW.DRUGABUSE.GOV/PUBLICATIONS/FINDER/T/123/COCAINE](https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/findert/123/cocaine)

GORDIE CENTER FOR SUBSTANCE ABUSE PREVENTION – UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

[HTTPS://GORDIECENTER.STUDENTHEALTH.VIRGINIA.EDU/DRUG-FACTS](https://gordiecenter.studenthealth.virginia.edu/drug-facts)

UNITED STATES DRUG ENFORCEMENT ADMINISTRATION – STATISTICS & FACTS

[HTTPS://WWW.DEA.GOV/RESOURCE-CENTER/STATISTICS.SHTML](https://www.dea.gov/resource-center/statistics.shtml)

CAMPUS STUDENT COUNSELING OR HEALTH CENTER