



CRACK FACT SHEET

What is crack?

Crack is cocaine that has been chemically freed from its base (hydrochloride salt). Crack is in the form of small chunks called rocks. They can be smoked in cigarette paper or in pipes often made of glass. The name crack comes from the crackling noise the rocks make when smoked. Crack is sold in small plastic vials or bags.

How does crack work?

Like cocaine powder, crack is a stimulant. But it acts even faster than cocaine. Smoking is the fastest route for any drug to reach the brain. Crack reaches the brain in only 8 to 10 seconds, and in very high concentrations.

How do people become addicted to crack?

Crack is even more addictive than cocaine powder. It is not uncommon to become addicted after only one use. The reason is that crack produces such a quick, intense and pleasurable high.

But, this high lasts only three to five minutes. Then, as with cocaine powder, the high is followed by a depression—a “crash.” The user then wants to take more crack to feel better.

The more often a user smokes crack, the more crack it takes to feel high. And as use increases, the crash becomes worse. The user then takes even more crack in order to avoid crashing. Once a user is hooked on crack, he or she is almost compelled to keep using.

How does crack affect the body?

Smoking crack can cause burning of the lips, throat and tongue, and, in the long term, lung damage. Users can experience nausea, tremors and convulsions. They tend to lose weight, and their appearance often suffers.

Like cocaine powder, crack has dangerous and unpredictable effects on the heart and circulatory system. Rapid pulse, irregular heartbeat and sudden changes in blood pressure can result, possibly leading to heart attacks and strokes. This can occur on the first use or on the hundredth use. There is no way to predict the drug’s effect on any one occasion.

What about the psychological effects of crack?

Like cocaine powder, crack produces initial feelings of self-confidence, power and exhilaration, followed by a period of depression when the user crashes. With continued use, the high is not as pronounced and the lows become worse. The user is likely to experience anxiety, depression, irritability and paranoia. Prolonged and frequent use of crack can lead to personality disintegration. It often causes the user to become violent. Child abuse and spouse abuse have been linked with crack use.

Why is crack so cheap?

Crack isn't cheap. A single vial does cost less than other drugs, but the high from that amount lasts only three to five minutes. It takes many vials to support a habit.

Where to get help?

Crack addicts do not get better on their own. Treatment is necessary. If you or someone you know needs information or advice, check with your school guidance office or look in the yellow pages under "Drug Treatment" for a local agency.

Things to Remember About Crack

1. Crack is highly addictive. Even one use can cause extreme craving for the drug.
2. Crack impairs a user's ability to think, perceive and react. It is never safe to drive while high on crack.
3. During processing, crack is mixed with additives such as amphetamines (speed) and anesthetics (e.g. procaine and benzocaine). Such fillers can have serious and even fatal effects.
4. Crack users frequently use depressant drugs like alcohol, valium and heroin to soften the crash. Polydrug use is dangerous and can be fatal.
5. Crack is an illegal drug. It is against the law to buy, sell or possess crack.
6. Violence is common in the illegal drug trade. Crack users may be subjected to force and violence by dealers and others.