

# COCAINE

**INFORMATION GUIDE ON USE,  
EFFECTS, SAFETY AND HELP**

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# INTRODUCTION

Cocaine is one of the most commonly used stimulant drugs in Scotland, alongside nicotine, caffeine and amphetamine. It is a white powder which is made by processing the leaves of the coca plant, which is mainly grown in South America.

The average purity of cocaine has been increasing around the world. The EMCDDA's European Drug Report 2019, reports the "highest estimates of cocaine purity at retail level in a decade". This means that the product people are buying may be stronger than they expect.

In the last few years, cocaine use has increased across Scotland. The NRS's report, Drug-related Deaths in Scotland in 2018, recorded that cocaine was "implicated in, or potentially contributed to, 273 deaths". This is a 658% increase since 2008. With cocaine use, purity and related harms increasing, it is important people are informed.

All drug use has risks. This booklet is for information only and does not constitute or replace medical advice. If you have medical concerns about your drug use, please speak to a medical professional.



# GETTING HIGH?

## Before taking any drug...

- Spend at least two hours researching the drug you are planning to take. These sites contain more information about the risks and effects of different drugs:

[crew.scot](http://crew.scot)

[erowid.org](http://erowid.org)

[psychonautwiki.org](http://psychonautwiki.org)

[drugsand.me](http://drugsand.me)

[tripsit.me](http://tripsit.me)



- **Test the drug.** If you don't have access to a drug checking service, reagent testing kits are available online and can give a greater understanding of what the drug contains, but they may not be suitable for identifying newer compounds or adulterants and can tell you nothing about purity or strength.



- Plan your doses and use a watch or timer to keep track of how frequently you are dosing.
- Grind or crush substances down as fine as possible before use. This makes it easier to judge a dose, speeds up absorption into the body and reduces the damage to soft tissue from abrasion.
- Use scales to measure the dose. Start with a small dose and go slow! Remember, that the more of a drug you take, the riskier it is and the more likely you are to experience negative effects.
- Avoid mixing different drugs including alcohol and medicines.
- Stay with people you trust, in a safe environment and be aware of dangers, such as water (e.g. rivers, lakes) and sharp or hot objects.
- Cocaine can decrease inhibitions and increase the likelihood of taking risks related to money, sex and other behaviours. Before you take it, set yourself some boundaries and try to stick to them.



# EFFECTS

Cocaine is a central nervous system stimulant which means it increases your heart rate and breathing.

Cocaine may make you temporarily feel happy, confident and alert. People taking it report experiencing an initial rush, followed by a short-lived high, followed by a strong urge to re-dose.

Some may experience reduced anxiety, become chatty and feel energetic. It can also increase focus and sex drive whilst reducing the desire to eat or sleep. Other effects include restlessness, aggression, paranoia, arrogance and over-confidence.

As well as physical and mental health harms, problematic cocaine use is linked to issues including loss of employment, suspension of driving license, breakdown of relationships, problem gambling and drug-related debt.

# COCAINE AND THE HEART

Cocaine is particularly harmful to the heart. It increases heart rate and blood pressure and disrupts the heart's electrical signals, causing it to beat rapidly or erratically.

It also causes the muscles of the heart to thicken and the blood vessels to stiffen and constrict, making it more difficult to circulate blood normally. This can cause a heart attack.



Cocaine use can be fatal and can cause health problems in the healthiest of people. Risks are further increased for those with a pre-existing health condition, those who are mixing drugs and those who are taking it frequently and/or in large amounts.



# COMING UP

- When snorting, it will take a few minutes to feel the full effects of cocaine. These effects wear off after around 30 minutes and after-effects may be felt for up to one hour.
- An average dose of powder cocaine for snorting is between 30-60 milligrams (this will vary depending on purity - this dose should not be taken as a recommendation).
- When smoking, injecting or taking cocaine rectally, start with a smaller dose. The effects are almost instantaneous, feel more intense, and wear off more quickly.
- As the effects come on you might feel excited and energetic. Take regular breaks to chill out.
- If you don't feel the effects, don't re-dose right away - wait at least one hour as the drug might not be what you thought it was.
- Avoid taking drugs when alone and have a sober friend around if possible. Tell them what you have taken, how much and when.
- If the effects become overwhelming, sit down and try to stay relaxed, the intensity will reduce with time. Get help if you need it. If in doubt, ring **999** for an ambulance.

# COMING DOWN

- When the cocaine wears off you may feel a strong urge to re-dose but try not to compensate by taking more. These cravings will pass.
- Try to resist taking any other drug. Or at least wait until the effects of the cocaine have completely worn off before taking anything else.
- If you feel low or anxious speak to people you trust.
- Stay hydrated by sipping water or an isotonic drink. Aim to drink half a pint (284mL) per hour. You won't need much more than this unless you are in a hot, busy environment.
- Your emotions could be up and down. If you feel irritable or bad-tempered do something that will relax you.
- Take a shower and drink some hot, sweet decaffeinated or herbal tea. Eat healthy balanced meals; if you're not hungry try to eat fruit and take multivitamins.
- When someone stops taking cocaine, after prolonged use, they may experience withdrawal. Withdrawal symptoms can include paranoia, tiredness, headaches, confusion, strong cravings and hallucinations. The severity of the symptoms will vary but most symptoms will ease after a few weeks. It is normal to feel low for several months after stopping cocaine use.



# ROUTES OF ADMINISTRATION

Route of administration is the way that you take the drug.

The most common route of administration for cocaine powder is snorting.

Crack and cocaine powder can be injected but this is very risky and is associated with many harms.

Crack cocaine is a solid form of cocaine. It is made by combining cocaine powder with baking soda, water and heat. This forms rocks which can be heated and inhaled.

Cocaine can also be dabbed by putting it under the tongue and some people may rub it onto the gums - this can cause rapid gum decay.



Regardless of your route of administration, it is important to research your desired method extensively before consuming any drug and take regular breaks from drug use to give your body time to heal.

# SNORTING?

Over time cocaine can degrade the septum (the cartilage separating the nostrils). It can also lead to a reduced sense of smell, nosebleeds, pain when swallowing, a runny/blocked nose and recurring nose or throat infections.

- 1** Grind it down as fine as possible and divide it into small lines. Ensure the surface is clean - unclean surfaces such as toilets, phones and keys can spread disease.
- 2** Avoid using bank notes as a tool to snort cocaine, as they aren't disposable and can cut the inside of your nose - post-its or paper straws are a good alternative to notes.
- 3** Sharing tools can spread infections and blood borne viruses (e.g. hepatitis C, HIV) - only use your own equipment. Get tested regularly for BBVs.
- 4** Position the tool as high up the nostril as possible and alternate nostrils for each dose.
- 5** Rinse your nose out with clean water at the end of a session, to prevent the powder causing further damage to the inside of your nose.
- 6** Apply a thin layer of vitamin E oil to the inside of the nose after rinsing.

# SMOKING?

Inhaling crack can damage the mouth, throat and lungs and can cause breathing difficulties, wheezing, chest pain, shortness of breath and in extreme cases, respiratory failure. It can also impact negatively on oral health and can cause sores, cuts and blisters on the lips and in the mouth.

- 1** Crush the crack rock into small pieces.
- 2** When smoking, the effects are intense but short-lived. This may leave you immediately craving more. Use a timer to keep track of use and try to wait as long as possible between doses.
- 3** If smoking from foil, use clean foil each time. This is available from injecting equipment providers (IEPs or needle exchanges).



- 4** If smoking from a pipe, use a clean glass pipe with a metal gauze. Pipes made from bottles and cans release fumes when heated. Glass pipes are less harmful and more efficient. They can be purchased cheaply from a headshop, or on online.
- 5** Allow the pipe to cool down between uses and hold the pipe as far away from the flame as possible to reduce the chance of burns. Keep all burns clean and dry. If they do not start to heal, and instead become more red, hot or inflamed, please seek medical help.
- 6** Stay hydrated. Smoking crack dries out the mouth so it's important to use lip balm, drink small sips of water regularly and brush your teeth twice a day.
- 7** Sharing pipes can spread infections and blood borne viruses (e.g. hepatitis C, HIV) - only use your own equipment. Get tested regularly for BBVs.
- 8** Avoid holding the smoke in your lungs, as this can damage tissue without giving a better 'hit'.



# INJECTING?

There is a higher risk of overdose if cocaine is injected. Injecting cocaine also risks damaging veins or the injecting site and can cause life-threatening infections and abscesses.

- 1** Only use new, sterile supplies. These are available from injecting equipment providers (IEPs or needle exchanges) or can be bought online.
- 2** People who inject stimulant drugs may inject frequently and will therefore need to ensure that they access enough supplies from their IEP. Always ask for extra equipment in case you need more than intended.
- 3** Sharing equipment including needles, filters, containers, spoons and water can spread infections and blood borne viruses (e.g. hepatitis C, HIV) - only use your own. Use colour coded equipment to avoid confusion and get tested regularly for BBVs.
- 4** Follow good hygiene practice and wash your hands and injection sites (before and after).

- 5 Citric acid, vitamin C and heat aren't needed to dissolve cocaine powder and their use can increase harms. Cocaine powder can be dissolved in water. Crack cocaine needs a small amount of citric acid, but no heat to dissolve.
- 6 Once dissolved in water, it is important to use a sterile filter to remove non-soluble substances which can cause harms if injected.
- 7 Use the smallest needle you can without it becoming blocked or breaking.
- 8 Keep the needle sterile and avoid licking the needle as this can transfer bacteria from the mouth into the skin and cause infections.
- 9 Use a new needle each time - needles become blunt after one use.
- 10 Rotate injection sites but try to avoid injecting in high-risk areas such as the neck and groin.
- 11 Dispose of equipment responsibly. Sharps bin can be sourced from and returned to IEPs.
- 12 Seek medical help if the injecting site is painful, tender or hot, or there is swelling for more than a few days.
- 13 Cocaine is sometimes mixed with heroin before being injected. This is extremely risky. Anyone who is at risk, or knows someone who is at risk, of an opioid overdose (e.g. heroin, methadone), should carry naloxone: [www.naloxone.org.uk](http://www.naloxone.org.uk)

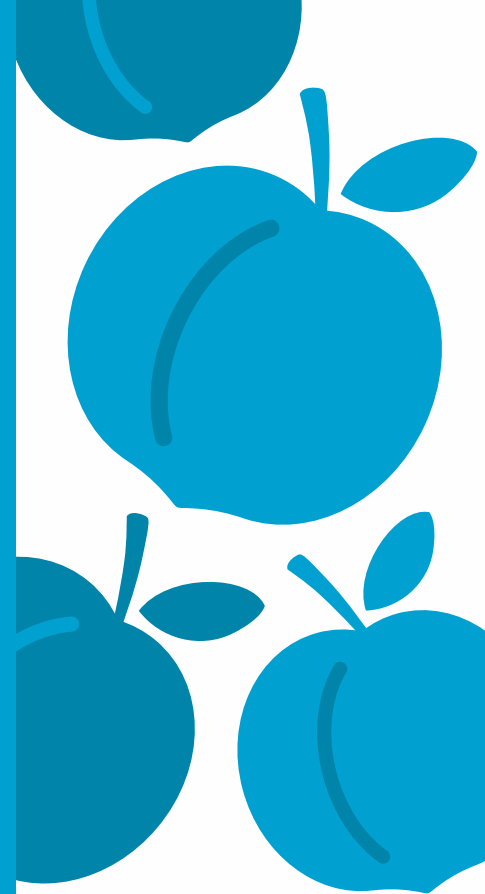


# UP THE BUM?

Taking drugs 'up the bum' is also called shelving, plugging, bumping or rectal administration. This route is efficient at absorbing drugs into the bloodstream (i.e. more cocaine enters your system than when snorting) but regularly shelving cocaine can cause soft tissue damage, rectal bleeding and increased sensitivity.

- 1** Ensure all equipment is clean and sterile before use - this includes washing your hands.
- 2** Dissolve the crushed powder in sterile water (0.5 millilitres is usually more than enough).
- 3** Use a clean, needleless syringe (or single use straw or lube launcher) to draw up the water containing the drug.
- 4** Add lube to the outside of the syringe to allow for easier entry and to prevent soft tissue damage.
- 5** Lie on your side, insert the syringe into the anus and slowly press the plunger all the way in. After a few minutes, gently and slowly pull the syringe out.

- 6** You can also insert the drugs in a gel capsule or cigarette paper, but this is more physically damaging than dissolving the drugs in water. Use lube and wash your hands before and after administration.
- 7** Cocaine and other drugs can make the bum numb and you may not be aware of damage - take care and check the area with clean hands. Be aware that this can make it harder for you to feel when you need to go to the toilet.
- 8** Some drugs (such as GBL) and adulterants (unexpected contents) might burn or damage tissue, which increases the risk of infection.
- 9** If you plan to have anal sex, use a condom and check for any reduced sensation or damage beforehand.
- 10** Sharing water, mixing cups, syringes, straws, lube launchers and lube can spread infections and blood borne viruses (e.g. hepatitis C, HIV) - only use your own. Get tested regularly for STIs and BBVs.
- 11** Look out for the signs of haemorrhoids (lumps inside and around your bum) or signs of infection and treat them quickly.
- 12** Use a vitamin E capsule or apply a thin layer of vitamin E oil to the inside of the anus after a session.





# MIXING

Polydrug use means taking more than one drug at a time (including alcohol and medicines). Taking different drugs at the same time increases the risk of each drug.



**Mixing drugs can cause unexpected and unpredictable results and is a major risk factor in drug-related deaths in Scotland.**

If you do mix drugs, do your research, ensure you are somewhere safe and take way less of both substances than you would if you were only taking one.

Taking cocaine with other uppers (such as MDMA, caffeine, amphetamine) increases the strain on the heart and body. Take regular breaks, stay hydrated (about half a pint of water or isotonic drink per hour) and look out for signs of overheating.



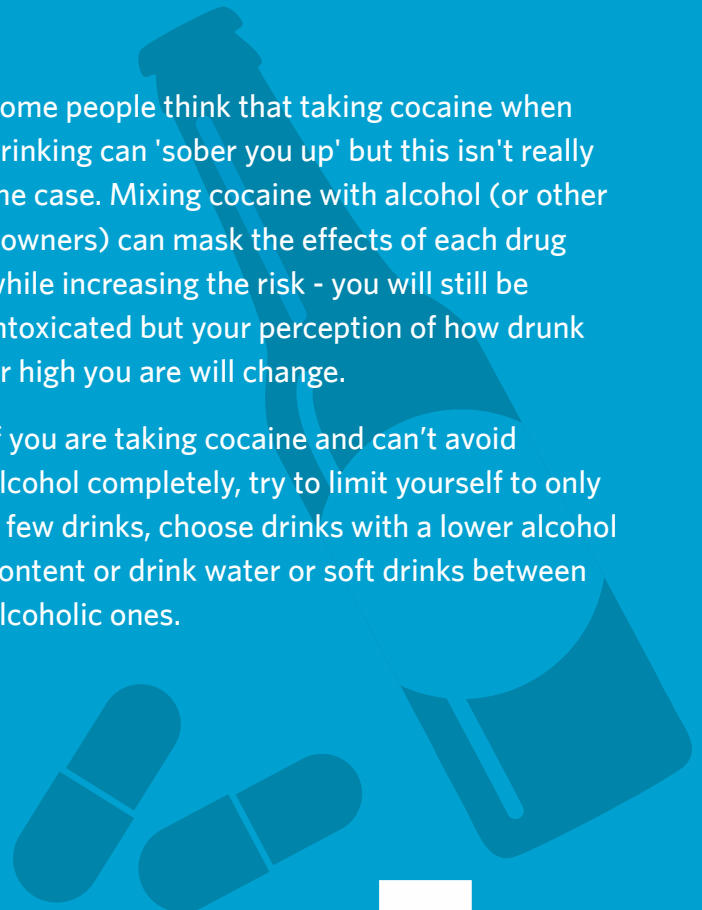
Mixing cocaine with cannabis, psychedelics (such as LSD) or dissociatives (such as ketamine) can increase bodily sensations, increase heart rate and increase the risk of experiencing nausea, feeling anxious and/or losing control. Reduce feelings of anxiety by staying calm, controlling your breathing and telling someone how you are feeling!

Mixing cocaine with downers including opioids (such as heroin) or depressants (such as alcohol, GHB and benzodiazepines like Valium and Xanax) is dangerous. Depressant drugs depress your central nervous system which means they slow your heart rate, response time and breathing. It is also dangerous to mix cocaine with monoamine oxidase inhibitors (MAOIs - a type of anti-depressant).

Mixing cocaine and alcohol creates a third substance in your body called cocaethylene which is thought to be more harmful and takes longer to leave the body.

Some people think that taking cocaine when drinking can 'sober you up' but this isn't really the case. Mixing cocaine with alcohol (or other downers) can mask the effects of each drug while increasing the risk - you will still be intoxicated but your perception of how drunk or high you are will change.

If you are taking cocaine and can't avoid alcohol completely, try to limit yourself to only a few drinks, choose drinks with a lower alcohol content or drink water or soft drinks between alcoholic ones.



# MONEY

In Scotland, street prices of cocaine powder can range from £40 to £200 per gram. The cost of frequent and prolonged cocaine use quickly adds up, especially when you build up a tolerance (i.e. need to take more to get the desired effects).

Set yourself limits on spending and ensure all the essential bills are paid before buying any cocaine. If you find this difficult, are spending more than planned or are spending more than you can afford, it is important to speak to someone you trust. For help and support on managing your money, visit Money Advice Scotland:

[www.moneyadvicescotland.org.uk](http://www.moneyadvicescotland.org.uk)

The impulsivity and risk-taking behaviours associated with cocaine mean it is linked to problem gambling.

People may try gambling as a way of making money to fund cocaine use, but this often makes the problem worse. For support on gambling related issues, visit GamCare: [www.gamcare.org.uk](http://www.gamcare.org.uk)

**Your safety, and the safety of your loved ones, may be at risk from unpaid drug debts. If you or your family are being threatened, you should contact the police. Those experiencing issues caused by a loved one's addiction can get support from Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol and Drugs: [www.sfad.org.uk](http://www.sfad.org.uk)**



# THE LAW

The sale and production of (non-medicinal) cocaine is illegal worldwide and is therefore pushed underground where it fuels a violent and environmentally destructive drugs trade.

Cocaine trafficking is dominated by organised crime groups in a market linked with gun and knife crime, modern slavery, money laundering and the exploitation of children and vulnerable people.

In the UK, cocaine is a Class A drug under the Misuse of Drugs Act (1971). It is illegal to possess, supply, possess with intent to supply, manufacture and/or import cocaine.



Penalties for possession are up to 7 years in prison and/or an unlimited fine.

Penalties for supply (including giving it to your mates for free) are up to life in prison and/or an unlimited fine. The penalties will depend on factors such as previous convictions, the severity of the offence and the type of drug.

Having a criminal record for drug-related offences can cause significant consequences including:

- Stigma (societal disapproval)
- Loss of employment/education
- Reduced career opportunities
- Higher insurance premiums
- Limited travel opportunities

For more information on cocaine and the law, visit:

[www.release.org.uk](http://www.release.org.uk)



# COCAINE AND DRIVING

Drugs can impair the ability to drive. Only drive if you are sober, feel well and aren't sleep deprived.

In Scotland, it is a crime to drive with a specified controlled drug in the body, in excess of a specified limit. The law applies to controlled drugs such as cocaine, cannabis, MDMA, ketamine, LSD and heroin, as well as prescription drugs, such as diazepam and methadone.

Police can make a requirement for a roadside drug test if they suspect drug use (e.g. smell cannabis), you commit a moving traffic offence (e.g. speeding or driving with a faulty light) or after any accident, regardless of fault. If a driver tests positive at the roadside using saliva from a mouth swab, they will be arrested and taken to a nearby police station for a confirmatory blood test. You can be arrested for refusing to take a roadside drug test.



The presence of cocaine at 10 micrograms/L or above, or benzoylecgonine (cocaine metabolite) at 50 micrograms/L or above can lead to a conviction for drug-driving.

If you're convicted of drug driving, you'll get:

- a minimum 1-year driving ban
- between 3 and 11 penalty points
- a fine of up to £5,000 and/or up to 6 months in prison
- a criminal record



The length of time a substance can be detected varies and can depend on the dose, purity and personal factors. Cocaine (and its metabolites) can be detected in the blood for several days after use and long after the effects have worn off.



# SEX

Like other stimulant drugs, cocaine can increase your feelings of arousal so it's important to think about consent. Are you really feeling it? Are they? Ensure you have full consent before, and during, any sexual activity.

It's also important to think about safe sex - grab condoms, dams and whatever else will help keep you safe depending on how you have sex. Not sure about your options? Ask us!

Use lube. This reduces the risk of the condom breaking, prevents damage to the soft tissue and makes sex more enjoyable! Taking stimulant drugs can reduce natural lubrication and this can increase the risk of passing on infections and disease. Get tested regularly for STIs and BBVs.

When we say that there is an increased risk when mixing different drugs, this includes drugs like Viagra. Anyone who has an erection for more than four hours should seek urgent medical attention.

Be aware that if you vomit or experience diarrhoea when taking drugs, your contraceptive pill could be affected. Use a barrier method or think about long term contraception such as an injection or implant.



# MENTAL HEALTH

The risk of experiencing an issue with your mental health when taking drugs is increased if you aren't sleeping well, eating well or are already diagnosed or experiencing mental health difficulties. Taking drugs in high doses, frequently dosing or taking more than one drug at a time also increases the risk.

Our mood is regulated by chemical messengers in the brain called neurotransmitters. Cocaine prevents the normal reuptake of dopamine (and other neurotransmitters) in the brain. This leads to a build-up of dopamine, which causes heightened feelings of pleasure.

To adapt to the dopamine-inducing effects of cocaine, the body reduces its dopamine production. This means that after a while, you won't experience the same euphoria as you did in the beginning. The more cocaine you take, the less dopamine you naturally produce, and heavy and/or prolonged cocaine use can leave people feeling low, depressed and anxious.





You may feel very low for a while after you stop taking cocaine, as your brain and body need some time to readjust. People report being unable to experience joy and happiness at events they previously would have. This is temporary and mood should improve over time after reducing or stopping cocaine use. During this time, eat healthily, get lots of rest and spend time with loved ones.

Excessive dopamine can cause significant behavioural and processing issues such as mania, paranoia and hallucinations.

Paranoia is the unfounded believe that you, or others are at risk of harm. People may report being followed or tracked through their electrical devices. People may also experience hallucinations (such as 'shadow people' or crawling insects) which further convince them of their paranoid beliefs.

Compulsive behaviours (e.g. picking at the skin, pacing the room) can be exacerbated or caused by stimulants.

If you or someone you know is experiencing difficulties with their mental health, it is important they try to reduce or stop use and seek help.

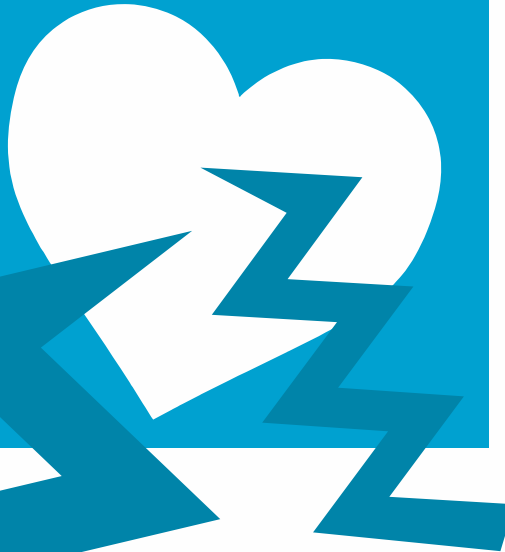
If you have suicidal thoughts or intentions, it's important to talk about it. You can contact the Samaritans on **116 123** or at [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org) or Breathing Space on **0800 83 85 84** or at [www.breathingspace.scot](http://www.breathingspace.scot)



# IN AN EMERGENCY

## Signs of a stimulant overdose...

- Seizures/fitting/rigid
- Hyperthermia (overheating)
- Severe nausea and vomiting
- Rapid heart rate/chest pains/heart attack
- Hallucinations
- Difficulty breathing
- Anxiety/fear/panic



# DO!

- Keep calm
- Get help
- Call 999 (or 112)
- Give as much information as possible including location, age, gender, what has happened and be honest about what they have taken
- Stay with the casualty
- If they are distressed, sit them somewhere calm and give reassurance
- If they are fitting, keep the area safe and move anything that could hurt them
- If they are overheating, take them somewhere cooler, loosen tight clothing, cool them using fans or wet towels and give them small sips of water
- If they are unconscious, put in the recovery position (or on their side) and monitor breathing

- If they stop breathing, perform CPR (chest compressions and rescue breaths)
- If you think opioids may be involved (e.g. they have taken heroin or are on a methadone prescription) administer naloxone

# DON'T!

- Leave them alone
- Inflict excessive pain to wake them
- Give any other drug
- Encourage them to vomit
- Give them anything to eat or drink (apart from small sips of water)
- Put them in a bath/shower
- Walk them about
- Attempt to restrain them



# EAT WELL

Cocaine suppresses your appetite and can make it easy to skip meals or miss out on healthy meals.

When the effects wear off people may find themselves binging on high-fat, low-nutrient foods. Poor nutrition can lower your immune system leaving you more prone to coughs and colds.

Try planning and preparing a week of meals in advance - this will make you less likely to skip meals.

Carry healthy snacks with you - nuts, seeds and bananas are a great source of quick vitamins and essential nutrients.

Make sure you are aiming for a good mix of calcium, protein, iron and healthy fats. Try to pack lots of vitamins into your diet and take vitamins supplements if needed.

Some people might find that stimulant drugs keep their weight down - however, it is healthy to have some fat mass. If you think that you are tempted to use more cocaine to avoid weight gain, then consult your GP or nutritionist. For support on eating disorders, visit Beat:

[www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk](http://www.beateatingdisorders.org.uk)

If you are diabetic, it is important to check your blood sugar is at a safe level before, during and after taking drugs. Read our Drugs and Diabetes resource for more info:

[www.crew.scot/drugs-and-diabetes](http://www.crew.scot/drugs-and-diabetes)



# SLEEP MANAGEMENT

Cocaine can make it difficult to fall asleep and stay asleep. It also reduces sleep quality.

Avoid taking stimulants (including caffeinated drinks) in the few hours before bedtime.

Avoid taking other drugs to ease the effects of cocaine. Mindfulness and breathing exercises can help you relax and dull the stimulant effects.

Try to exercise each day. Even short periods of light exercise can improve sleep quality.

Maintain a regular sleep routine and stick to it.

Avoid eating, drinking alcohol and using electronic devices close to bedtime. Use an app or change the settings on your phone to reduce the blue light emitted from the screen.

Keep your bedroom cool and dark when you are trying to sleep.

Make your bed comfortable. Keep your sheets clean and use a good pillow.

Pay attention to what works for you – keep going when you find it!



# TRYING TO STOP?

Think about your use - what are the pros and cons? Write them down.

Set small, manageable and measurable goals, like increasing the length of time between each dose.

Only carry what you plan on taking. If you have a couple of grams in your pocket it is easy to take more than you anticipated. Leave what you don't need at home (in a safe place).

Track patterns of use and identify strategies for managing triggers. If you usually take cocaine with certain people, hold off seeing them for a bit. If you always end up ordering it after you have had a few beers, avoid drinking.

Manage your cravings. Try natural highs such as light exercise and meditation. Many people find mindfulness to be a useful practice to develop.

Try ear acupuncture at Crew - it can help with cravings and for cutting down on use if you want to.

Crew let independent community groups use our space. For a timetable of the fellowship groups held at Crew, such as Cocaine Anonymous, visit

[www.crew.scot/contact-us](http://www.crew.scot/contact-us)

**Drug services can help support you to reduce, stabilise or cease drug taking. Consider talking to someone if you are finding it difficult to stop taking cocaine. For drug services in your area, visit: [www.scottishdrugservices.com](http://www.scottishdrugservices.com)**



# TRYING TO HELP?

If someone is having problems with cocaine it can have extreme consequences for those around them.

It's not always easy to help but your support is a powerful motivator. Try to have open and honest conversations with the person when you are both calm and sober.

Let them know how their behaviour is affecting you and others, and that your concerns come from a place of love. It can be helpful to write down what you want to say in advance.

It is always of primary importance to keep yourself (and your dependants) safe. It can be helpful to chat about issues you are experiencing with people you trust. For information on ways to help, as well as details of family services and support (either online, over the phone, in person or in a group), visit: [www.sfad.org.uk](http://www.sfad.org.uk)

If you are in Edinburgh and the Lothians and are concerned about your own, or a loved one's drug use, Crew is here for you! We provide free, inclusive, non-judgemental counselling for those experiencing problems related to psychostimulant drugs.

**To find out more, call 0131 220 3404  
or visit: [www.crew.scot](http://www.crew.scot)**

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