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CRACK

The chemical cocaine hydrochloride is commonly known as cocaine. Some users chemically process cocaine in order to remove the hydrochloride. This process is called "freebasing" and makes the drug more potent. "Crack" is a solid form of freebased cocaine. It is called "crack" because it snaps and cracks when heated and smoked.

HOW CRACK IS USED

Crack is used the same way that freebase is used, namely, by placing the substance in a glass pipe (or hash pipe) with a fine mesh screen under it, then heating it and inhaling the vapors. The vapors of the freebase are absorbed through the lungs into the bloodstream and transported to the brain within 10-15 seconds. One inhalation will produce a degree of intoxication usually lasting 10-15 minutes.

CRACK'S ADVERSE EFFECTS

As with any street drug, what is sold may not be what it is claimed to be. Predicting side effects is difficult when the actual contents are not known. Life-threatening reactions have been reported whether it's the 1st, the 100th, or any other time crack is used. You do not have to overdose on crack to die from it.

In addition, if the initial experience leads to continued use, other adverse effects include the rapid development of tolerance, addiction, and all the social problems that can come from an expensive drug habit.

Regardless of dosage, these reactions may appear:

- convulsions
- increased heart rate
- abnormal heartbeat
- heart attack
- sudden, sharp blood pressure increase
- stroke
- extreme depression
- suicidal behavior

Other Physical Effects include

- chronic sore throat
- hoarseness
- shortness of breath
- bronchitis
- lung cancer
- emphysema and other lung damage
- respiratory problems such as congestion of the lungs, wheezing, and spitting up black phlegm
- burning of the lips, tongue, and throat
- slowed digestion
- weight loss
- high incidence of dependence
- blood vessel constriction
- brain seizures that can result in suffocation
- dilated pupils
- sweating
- rise in blood sugar levels and body temperature
- disability from drug-induced health problems
- suppressed desire for food, sex, friends, family, and social contacts

(over)

Emotional/Psychological Effects:

- sadness and depression
- loss of interest in appearance
- loss of household valuables or unexplained vanishing cash due to the expense of the drug
- sleeplessness
- extreme paranoia
- intense craving of the drug
- schizophrenic-like psychosis with delusions and hallucinations

Crack Addiction

The following are four stages which have been identified with crack addiction:

- intense feeling of stimulation
- followed by feelings of sadness and depression
- irritability, sleeplessness and paranoia
- schizophrenic-like psychosis with delusions and hallucinations

Withdrawal

Because crack is extremely addictive, the following withdrawal symptoms may occur when a person is not using the drug:

- nausea
- paranoia
- intense craving of the drug
- physical problems

Crack and Pregnancy

If crack is taken during pregnancy, there is an increased incidence of miscarriages, still births, and premature (often fatal) labor and delivery. In males, the cocaine in crack may attach to the sperm causing damage to the cells of the fetus. Babies exposed to cocaine experience painful and life threatening withdrawal, are irritable, have poor ability to regulate their own body temperature and blood sugar and are at increased risk of having seizures.

STOP NOW

Cocaine addiction is a chronic, relapsing “brain disease” characterized by compulsive drug seeking and use as a result of chemical imbalances in the brain. Long-term use of cocaine can alter the brain’s chemistry to the point that the individual may have very long-term and possibly permanent cravings for cocaine. A national study has found that treatment for cocaine or crack dependency is effective, reducing cocaine or crack use by over 50 percent. The study did report that clients using cocaine in combination with heroin were harder to treat. In addition, treatment reduces criminal activity up to 80 percent, increases employment, improves health, and reduces risky sexual behavior.

Although a person addicted to crack may experience withdrawal symptoms for a short time, the benefits to a person who stops using the drug greatly outweigh an addiction to crack. These benefits include improved health and greater enjoyment of everyday activities.

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For questions on substance use, abuse and related problems, call NCADA's Help Line at (314) 962-3456.