

Fact sheets 2025

What is cocaine?

Cocaine is derived from the coca plant. It is a stimulant drug, which means that it speeds up messages travelling between the brain and the rest of the body.

Cocaine comes in several forms:

- Cocaine hydrochloride is a powder and the most common form of the drug. It is usually sniffed through the nose but may also be injected.
- If the hydrochloride is removed through a chemical process, the drug is converted to 'free base' cocaine, which is predominantly smoked or injected.
- 'Crack' is another form of 'free base' cocaine that comes as small rocks or crystals and is usually smoked or injected.

In Australia, cocaine is most commonly found in powder form (usually a white or off-white colour) and is normally sold in 'points' (0.1g) or grams.

What are the effects?

The effects of cocaine are almost immediate and last between 30 minutes and four hours, which can lead to a pattern of binge behaviour characterised by frequent, repeated use. The effects of cocaine depend on the quantity consumed, body size, general health, mood, past experience with cocaine, whether cocaine is used on its own or with other drugs, and the composition of the drug.

Short-term effects include:

- Increased energy, talkativeness and confidence
- A feeling of euphoria ('high') and alertness
- Reduced appetite
- Dry mouth
- Enlarged (dilated) pupils
- Elevated blood pressure and faster heart rate
- Higher body temperature
- Increased sex drive
- Irritability, agitation or aggressive behaviour.

The 'rush' from cocaine doesn't last very long (usually between 30 and 45 minutes). People may experience a 'comedown' or 'crash' the next day when the drug starts to wear off. This can last a few days and symptoms may include:

- Feeling uncomfortable
- Lethargy (having little energy or motivation)
- Irritability
- Paranoia.

Cocaine

coke, rack, cola, yay-yo, powder, toot, charlie, C, candy, dust, flake, nose candy, snow, white, white lady, crack, rock, freebase.



What are the risks?

Cocaine use can come with a range of harms if taken in high doses and on a regular basis, or by people with pre-existing problems or susceptibilities (e.g., heart conditions that people may or may not be aware of).

Regular use of cocaine may eventually cause:

- Insomnia and exhaustion
- Depression
- Anxiety, paranoia and psychosis
- Sexual dysfunction
- High blood pressure and irregular heartbeat
- Cardiovascular (heart) disease
- Stroke
- Liver, kidney and lung problems
- Cognitive impairments, such as loss in attention, memory, and impulsivity control.

Snorting cocaine regularly can also cause:

- Runny nose and nose bleeds
- Long term damage to the nasal cavity and sinuses
- Damage to the teeth and gums.

Toxicity and overdose

Symptoms of cocaine 'overdose' include:

- Nausea and vomiting
- Chest pain
- Heart failure
- Seizures
- Stroke
- Kidney failure
- Liver damage
- Panic
- Extreme anxiety, agitation and paranoia
- Hallucinations.

Mixing cocaine with other drugs

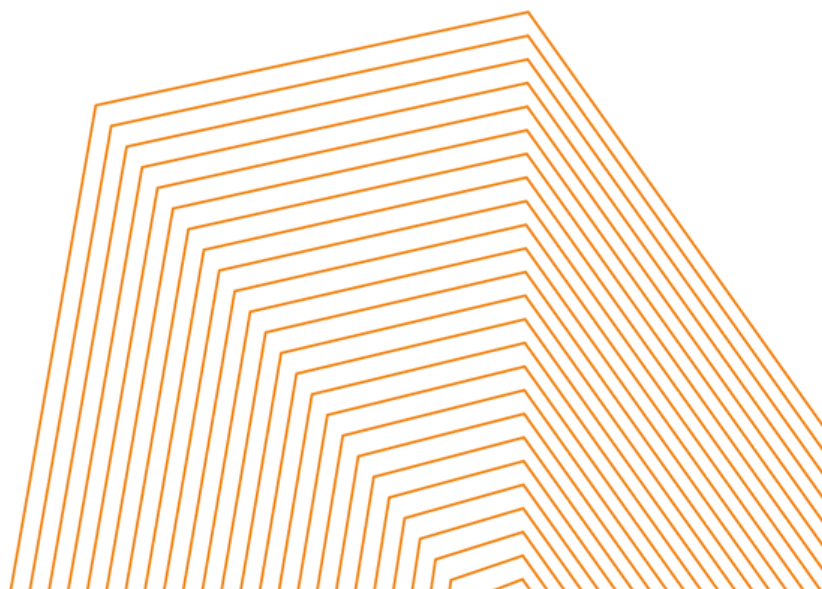
Mixing cocaine with other drugs, including over the counter or prescription medications, or alcohol can be dangerous and fatal. Polydrug use increases the risk of drug toxicity, which can lead to unpredictable adverse effects, severe negative health and mental health outcomes, and even death.

Dependence and withdrawal

There is a recognised psychostimulant withdrawal syndrome. The prominent symptoms include:

- Depression
- Anxiety and agitation
- Fatigue
- Insomnia
- Craving for cocaine.

The acute phase of withdrawal peaks within the first 24 hours after taking the drug but with heavier use and severe dependency, these symptoms intensify and may last longer.



Death

Death due to cocaine use is mainly due to heart attacks, seizures or stroke. Cocaine causes damage to the heart, which increases the risk of death.

Between 2003 and 2022, the rate of drug overdose deaths involving cocaine increased, on average, by 11% per year to reach a historical high of 0.39 deaths per 100,000 people in 2020 and stabilising thereafter.

In 2022, there were 68 drug overdose deaths involving cocaine recorded in Australia. Most of these deaths occurred among males in the 25-34-year age group, with 91% of these (61 deaths) deemed unintentional.

A study conducted by the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre (NDARC) at UNSW Sydney found that more widespread use of cocaine resulted in a large increase in deaths, particularly among people with no history of substance use problems.

Mental health

Repeated use of cocaine can be associated with mental health problems, including:

- Depression
- Anxiety, paranoia and panic attacks
- Cocaine psychosis, with symptoms such as delusions, hallucinations, and aggressive behaviour.

Treatment

Treatment for cocaine dependence includes inpatient rehabilitation programs, outpatient therapy, support groups, or individual therapy such as cognitive behavioural therapy.

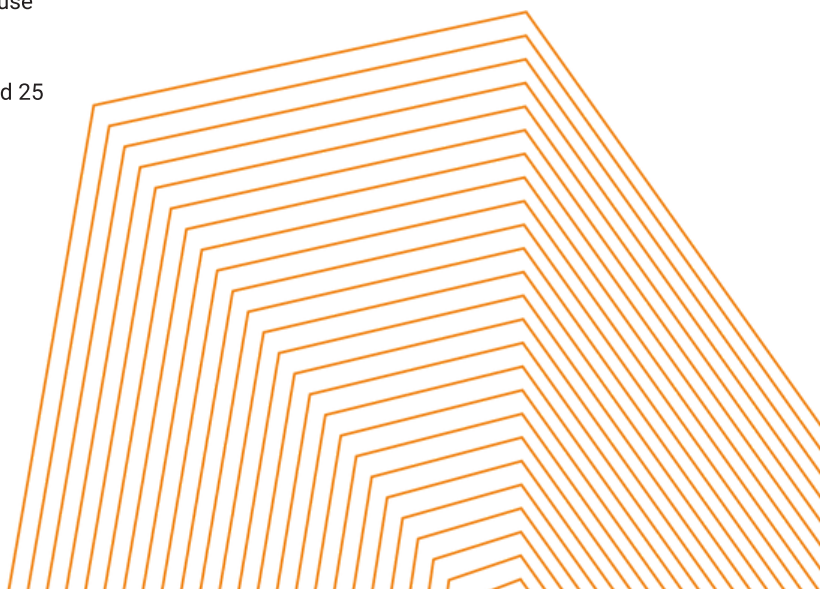
Cocaine trends in Australia

According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's National Drug Strategy Household Survey (NDSHS), in 2022-23, 4.5% of Australians over the age of 14 had used cocaine in the previous 12 months, which equates to 1 million people.

Furthermore, 13.5% of the population aged over 14 reported lifetime use of cocaine in 2022-23, which equates to 2.9 million people.

Recent cocaine use is most common among those aged 18 to 24, and 25 to 34. While men have typically been more likely to use cocaine than women, this gap has narrowed.

The 2022-23 NDSHS showed that women aged 18 to 24 were just as likely to have used cocaine in the last 12 months as men.





Emergency info

If you, or someone around you, is experiencing undesired or distressing psychological or physical symptoms from the intake of alcohol or other drugs please seek immediate medical attention.

If you need urgent help from ambulance services call Triple Zero (000). If a person has been mixing drugs with alcohol or other drugs, tell the paramedic exactly what has been taken.

Services

For free and confidential advice about alcohol and other drugs, call the National Alcohol and Other Drug hotline on 1800 250 015.

The hotline will automatically direct you to the Alcohol and Drug Information Service in your state or territory.

More resources

The Illicit Drug Reporting System (IDRS) is an Australian monitoring system run by the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre (NDARC) at UNSW Sydney that identifies emerging trends of local and national concern in illicit drug markets. Visit unsw.to/IDRS

The Ecstasy and Related Drugs Reporting System (EDRS) is an Australian monitoring system run by NDARC that identifies emerging trends of local and national interest in ecstasy and related drug use, markets and harms. Visit unsw.to/EDRS

The Pocket Guide to Drugs and Health is a publication authored by experts from NDARC that provides information for health professionals on the impact of drug use. Visit silverbackpublishing.org/products/the-pocket-guide-to-drugs-and-health

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare collects information on alcohol and tobacco consumption, and illicit drug use among the general population in Australia. Visit aihw.gov.au

The Australian Bureau of Statistics is Australia's national statistical agency, providing official statistics on a range of economic, social, population and environmental matters of importance to Australia. Visit abs.gov.au

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