

# ALCOHOL AND DRUG DEPENDENCE SEVEN – COCAINE AND CRACK

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**(This is based on belief in God. If that offends you, stop reading now)**

In this presentation, we will look at cocaine, considered by some to be a ‘cool’ drug.

The more impotent we feel, the less able to change anything in our circumstances or world, the more we fantasize about power. There’s a reason nerds read comic books. In fantasy worlds, they can be invulnerable, faster and more powerful than any bully.

The bigger and more intrusive government becomes, the more people flock to see movies about superheroes. Or turn to stimulants like crack and cocaine to feel more powerful, smarter, sexier or more in any way, than they believe themselves to be otherwise. (To be continued)

## **General Description of Drugs in this Class:**

Cocaine is a natural substance, found in the leaves of the South American coca bush. During the Inca Empire, high priests mixed coca leaves with lime, chewing them in a search for religious truths. In the mid-1800s, a scientist extracted pure cocaine. By 1902, it was in tonics, potions and beverages sold in drugstores. In 1903, Coca-Cola removed cocaine from the leaves used to make their beverage. By 1914, the use of coca leaves was restricted in the U.S.

When solvents are used to produce pure cocaine, the resulting form is ‘crack,’ formed into large crystals. No longer soluble, it must be smoked to be ingested.

**Common Street Names:** Coke, snow, flake, blow, crack and many others

## **How Cocaine Affects Users:**

Cocaine prompts a release of dopamine, associated with pleasure and movement, then inhibits dopamine’s reabsorption by receiving neurons. The buildup creates the euphoria commonly reported by users. The rush makes them feel powerful, hyper-stimulated, energetic and seems worth the considerable risk. Cocaine is also used as an escape, to fill empty time or escape from intolerable life situations. Once addiction sets in, the drug is in control.

How long cocaine’s effects last, depends on how it’s taken. The faster the absorption, the more intense the high, but the shorter its duration. Increased use reduces how long users feel high, increasing risk of addiction. Smoking crack produces a rapid reaction, but the high lasts only between 3-5 minutes, before the mind and body crave more.

## **Legitimate Medical Uses:**

None

## **Reasons Behind Cocaine Use:**

Cocaine temporarily masks unpleasant realities. The rush feels good, while the drug is in effect. Users lose weight and get more done with less sleep. They feel smarter and more alert with it, duller, exhausted and depressed without it. It loosens inhibitions during parties. Addicted users become unable to cope with life, powerless to the mind’s demands for more.

## **Consequences for Abuse of Crack and Cocaine**

### Physical Health

Constricted blood vessels, dilated pupils, increased temperature, heart rate and blood pressure put circulatory systems at risk. Especially if users increase doses to prolong euphoria. While tolerance to the high builds, users also become more sensitive to cocaine's anesthetic and convulsing effects, potentially resulting in death.

Other complications include disturbances in heart rhythm, heart attacks, chest pain, respiratory failure, strokes, seizures, headaches and gastrointestinal complications such as abdominal pain and nausea. As appetite decreases, chronic users become malnourished. Freebasing cocaine with volatile solvents can result in explosions. Contaminated injection paraphernalia can result in HIV and other blood-borne diseases like hepatitis.

Different means of use create different hazards. Snorting it leads to loss of the sense of smell, nosebleeds, problems with swallowing and hoarseness. Ingesting cocaine can cause bowel gangrene from reduced blood flow. When people mix cocaine and alcohol, they perform a complex chemical experiment inside them, creating cocaethylene, a good route to sudden death.

### Mental Health

Some users report feelings of restlessness, irritability and anxiety. Tolerance to the drug requires using more and more. Large amounts can cause bizarre, violent behavior. Binging cocaine results in increasing irritability, restlessness and paranoia, including full-blown psychosis, where users lose touch with reality and experience auditory hallucinations. Long term users experience long-term effects. The 'high' is gradually replaced by restlessness, extreme excitability, insomnia, paranoia, hallucinations and delusions. Some users recover after stopping.

With a high lasting mere minutes, crack use can create personality changes lasting hours.

### Probability of Addiction / Dependence

Psychological dependence exists when a drug is so central to a person's thoughts, emotions and activities, it becomes a craving or compulsion. Cocaine users often suffer severe depression which lifts only when they take it again. Cocaine may be the most powerful drug in producing psychological dependence. At present, it's unclear if physical dependence occurs.

Crack is cheap, but short lasting and extremely addictive, quickly taking control of users' lives and finances. Crack cocaine does produce a strong mental dependency. With heavy use, unpleasant symptoms mentioned earlier increasingly occur, rather than expected euphoria.

### Social or Societal Consequences

Users quickly become pretty much useless in other roles in life. Getting more of the drug grows to control minds and decisions. This self-centeredness is the exact opposite of love. It doesn't take long for spouses and children to realize they no longer matter. Or to respond in kind. Prison sentences are also detrimental to marriages, careers or even finding work afterwards.

### Legal Consequences

Cocaine is a Class A drug, illegal to produce, supply or possess. It is also illegal to allow premises to be used for cocaine supply, production or consumption. Penalties are high.

### **The Trap Associated With Cocaine Use:**

It takes more and more of this fairly expensive drug to get the same high. Mentally addicted users will buy and buy, till money runs out. Most eventually turn to crime or dealing in cocaine, to find cash to supply their habit. Cocaine suppliers are really pretty ruthless, given the money involved. Lucky beginning dealers just wind up in prison. The rest wind up murdered.

There is an even more dangerous trap for users. Cocaine can be up to 80 percent pure, but is usually between 5 and 50 percent. This is because dealers cut cocaine with cornstarch, talcum powder or powdered sugar. If it becomes too weak, they can add local anesthetics like procaine or benzocaine. The net result? Inexperienced users have no real idea, what will happen to them with whatever they are about to use. It is an interesting form of Russian roulette.

### **The Rest of the Story:**

As one of those nerds mentioned beforehand, I used another defense against bullies. My dad was bigger than their dad. Interestingly, I still use that defense when I feel powerless, I just have a much stronger protector against evil. My heavenly father is so much more powerful than any demon I might encounter, and he is good enough to provide whatever I need, so long as my request is in keeping with His will for my life.

### **A Practical Application:**

When seeking significance in a life that feels empty, consider the onion. Its petals as similar to the roles we play in life, the layers that comprise our identity and make us matter. What we are, not to ourselves, but to others in whose lives there will be a void, when we pass from this world.

We can divest ourselves of all responsibility and live only for self. But like removing onion petals, when all roles have been lost, there's not much left at the core. The only reason we matter, is because of what we are in the others lives. Significance requires us to do for others, expecting nothing back. God said those who desire friends, must first be friendly.

Incidentally, doing for others is also a recipe to also end loneliness at the root of depression.



### **A Historical Application:**

Samson, a miracle given to Israel to deliver them with incredible strength and promise, also believed pursuing pleasure was worth considerable risks.

Samson started out well, but soon noticed a Philistine woman. Despite her being an enemy, he wanted to marry her. Over his parents objection, he pursued her. During the wedding, Samson engaged in a foolish bet with thirty enemies, over a riddle about an incident on Samson's journey there. The men decided the fastest way to an answer was threatening his bride-to-be with death, if she didn't get the answer from Samson. They got the answer, he lost the bet, so Samson killed all of them and left without his wife. He later returned for her, to find she had been given to another. Enraged, he engaged in a battle with the Philistines, killing a thousand of them.

Instead of learning from mistakes, Samson was always making new ones involving foolish risk. He kept returning to the land of the Philistines, messing with their women, knowing all along that inhabitants of Philistia wanted him dead. They almost trapped him after a night with a prostitute in Gaza, but he still took his leave, along with their city gates.

When Samson met Delilah, he stayed way too long and answered way too many questions. Even when it was obvious, she was trying to get him captured and killed. He enjoyed Delilah so much, he felt the risk was worth the pleasure. As with most gamblers, eventually he lost. He was captured, blinded and put to work as a beast of burden. He eventually paid with his life for pursuing pleasure that he knew all along, would lead to his imprisonment or death.

### **Trying Out a Better Way**

Many are little different than Samson. They believe cocaine offers more than it takes, even knowing pursuit of that pleasure will result in their imprisonment or death. Others look to God for answers they once sought in cocaine, finding empowerment, significance and freedom.

What do they give up in return? Ask any God user. You get back from God, far more than you ever give up.

If you were willing to risk cocaine, what on earth would make you to hesitate to try God?



The Blinding of Samson - Rembrandt

