

COCAINE

DESCRIPTION – Cocaine, the most potent stimulant of natural origin, is extracted from the leaves of the coca plant, which is indigenous to the Andean highlands of South America. Natives in this region chew or brew coca leaves into a tea for refreshment and to relieve fatigue. Pure cocaine was first isolated in the 1880's and used as a local anesthetic in eye surgery. It was particularly useful in surgery of the nose and throat because of its ability to provide anesthesia, as well as to constrict blood vessels and limit bleeding.

PACKAGING – Cocaine is usually distributed as a white crystalline powder or as an off-white chunky material. The powder is often diluted with a variety of substances, the most common being sugars such as lactose, inositol, and mannitol, and local anesthetics such as lidocaine. Crack, the chunk rock form of cocaine is a ready-to-use freebase.

METHODS OF USE – The major routes of administration of cocaine are sniffing or snorting, injecting, and smoking (including free-base and crack cocaine). Snorting is the process of inhaling cocaine powder through the nose where it is absorbed into the bloodstream through the nasal tissues. Injecting is the act of using a needle to release the drug directly into the bloodstream. Smoking involves inhaling cocaine vapor or smoke into the lungs where absorption into the bloodstream is as rapid as by injection.

STREET NAMES – Icing, junk aunt, big C, blow, coke, candy, and snow.

PHYSICAL EFFECTS – Short-term effects of cocaine include constricted peripheral blood vessels, dilated pupils, increased temperature, heart rate, blood pressure, insomnia, loss of appetite, feelings of restlessness, irritability, and anxiety. Duration of cocaine's immediate euphoric effects, which include energy, reduced fatigue, and mental clarity, depends on how it is used. The faster the absorption, the more intense the high. However, the faster the absorption, the shorter the high lasts. The high from snorting may last 15 to 30 minutes, while that from smoking may last 5 to 10 minutes. Cocaine's effects are short lived, and once the drug leaves the brain, the user experiences a "coke crash" that includes depression, irritability, and fatigue.

High doses of cocaine and/or prolonged use can trigger paranoia. Smoking crack cocaine can produce a particularly aggressive paranoid behavior in users. When addicted individuals stop using cocaine, they often become depressed. Prolonged cocaine snorting can result in ulceration of the mucous membrane of the nose.