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CRACK...the Facts

What is Crack?

Crack, sometimes called “rock,” is a purified form of cocaine that is smoked by inhaling the vapors given off as the drug is heated. Crack is preprocessed and sold in small chunks which can be smoked in a marijuana or tobacco cigarette, or in a special pipe, usually made of glass. The drug is said to take its name from the cracking noise it makes when smoked.

Crack is sold in small plastic vials and is in the form of small white, grey or beige rough chunks. Crack can be purchased in small amounts - enough for two uses - for an average of \$ 5 to \$ 10.

What does Crack look like?

A dose of Crack, which is a purified form of cocaine, is white or tan, and looks like small lumps or shavings of soap--but has the texture of porcelain. Two or three doses can cause addiction. Because this smokable form of cocaine delivers 10 times the impact of “snorting” the powder, casual use can cause death from heart or respiratory failure.

What are the effects?

The effects of Crack are produced in 4 to 6 seconds, are intensely euphoric and last between 5 and 7 minutes. By contrast, when cocaine is snorted, the effects are produced in 1 to 3 minutes and last 20 to 30 minutes. The intense, though short high is followed by a deep depression, thereby encouraging continued use of the drug.

Physical manifestations: How Crack destroys the mind & body

Nerves - when high, the user becomes stimulated, hyperactive, irritable and sometimes engages in indiscriminate sexual acts.

Lungs - heavy crack use can cause hoarseness and bronchitis.

Arms & Legs - convulse as the user becomes nervous & feels his / her muscles contracting.

Weight - crack bingers lose interest in eating & sleeping, some suffer drastic weight loss.

Brain - biochemical state altered and addiction takes hold faster than any other drug, including heroin.

Eyes - pupils may dilate, increasing light sensitivity. Users may see “snow lights” or “halos” which appear around everything he / she tries to focus on.

Heart - heart rate jumps 50 % and sometimes becomes irregular and can cause a heart attack.

Crack reaches the brain seconds after it is smoked, creating a powerful high followed by a painful “crash.” To cushion the withdrawal, the user craves another crack “hit” or turns to alcohol or other drugs.

Psychological manifestations

The effects of Crack are very similar to cocaine...and like cocaine, Crack is extremely seductive. The drug initially gives users feelings of self-confidence, power and exhilaration. These feelings are normally followed by a period of extreme depression or “crash. “ With continued use, tolerance develops and the drug causes depression, paranoia, irritability and other problems.

Five Warning Signs

Crack users describe various stages when they come down off the drug:

- worrying about where they can get more
- deep depression
- loss of energy and appetite
- difficulty sleeping
- changing love / hate feelings about themselves

Why is Crack so dangerous?

“Once you start using Crack, you can’t stop” is one of the most commonly heard remarks on the street. Crack is an especially dangerous drug because it can cause intense dependency and addiction after only a relatively short period of use.

The intensity of the high produced by Crack is followed by an equally intense “crash”, or period of depression...the higher the high, the lower the low. The desire to compensate for the low leads to the pattern of compulsive use that has been associated with Crack.

In a brief period of time, the drug begins to control the user. Smoking Crack provides a rapid and intense high followed by a severe depression, feelings of worthlessness and a craving for more of the drug. This is the pattern of behavior that leads to addiction and dependence.

The compulsion to continue Crack use has led to the “binges” that are often described by users. During a binge, Crack is smoked continuously until money and / or drug supplies are gone or the user experiences physical collapse. The need for crack supersedes every other need leading to crime and violence to acquire it.

Cocaine overdose and psychosis

Because of the large doses of the drug that are taken into the bloodstream and the brain, smoking Crack increases the chance of cocaine overdose or poisoning. Symptoms of both include nausea, vomiting and irregular breathing. Convulsions, coma and death are also possible. Using cocaine in combination with other drugs, such as alcohol or opiates (speed), can also cause severe and potentially fatal reactions. After repeated and continued use of Crack, users may develop cocaine psychosis, a condition which is characterized by paranoia as well as visual, auditory and other sensory hallucinations.

How can you tell if someone you know is using Crack?

An early sign of difficulty can be an abrupt breakdown in family communications or a change in a person's behavior. A marked change in personality, a loss of interest in personal appearance, paranoid behavior or animosity toward family and friends can be significant.

Other symptoms include restlessness, anxiety, an inability to concentrate, marked agitation, weight loss and altered sleep patterns.

These symptoms, where young people are concerned, may often be signs of anxieties experienced during adolescence, but if illicit substances are involved they would probably be magnified. Other danger signals include associations with new friends known to use drugs or unexplained disappearances of money and valuables from the house.

How is Crack sold?

Crack is merchandised by drug dealers as a cheap, easy and accessible way to use cocaine. Because it is smoked, rather than snorted (sniffing through nasal passages) or injected, its appeal has grown dramatically. The sale of Crack has been reported at numerous urban and suburban locations. It is sold both at known "drug-copping" areas and at locations where there was previously little to no drug activity, such as schools or malls, etc.

"Base" or "Crack houses" - locations set up to sell or smoke Crack - have sprung up in many areas. They typically operate in a clubroom, storefront, apartment or similar private place. Crack is sold to be used on the premises or to be taken out.

Young users, in particular, are attracted to crack by its "harmless" appearance and small size - making it easy to conceal. Crack's growing availability and convenience of use makes it one of the most marketable drugs sold on the street today.

Some important phone numbers for help and support are:

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| Cocaine Helpline | 1-800-COCAINE |
| National Institute on Drug Abuse | 1-800-662-HELP |