

# Effects of Crack and Cocaine in HIV

## What is crack or cocaine?

Cocaine is a drug that comes from a plant. It originally was used as a medicine but was found to have too many bad effects so is no longer used for that purpose. Instead it is mainly used as a street drug now. Cocaine usually comes as a powder and is usually snorted into the nose but can also be injected into a vein or smoked. Crack is more solid form and is more addictive; it also can be injected but is usually smoked. Common street names are “blow,” “snow,” “coke,” “rock,” and “nose candy.”

## What does cocaine or crack do to my body?

This drug acts as a stimulant, meaning that it makes the user feel a “rush” or a boost of energy after using it. The “rush” usually lasts from 5-10 minutes if it is smoked and for 15-30 minutes if it is snorted. It will make you feel wide awake for awhile but then you come crashing down after the initial high. It can decrease fatigue and may make you think you are thinking more clearly.

## What are some ways that crack or cocaine can hurt my body?

Cocaine and crack are both very addictive drugs, the solid crack more than the powder cocaine. This means that people who use these drugs can get to the point that their body craves or needs the drug and they cannot live without it. Using either form of the drug can raise your blood pressure to a dangerous level causing strokes or seizures; it can raise your pulse and the work your heart has to do leading to bad heart rhythms (palpitations) or chest pains or heart attacks. It can also cause your temperature to go high, possibly causing seizures.

## Does crack or cocaine affect my HIV or my immune system?

Many studies have shown that people who do crack or cocaine are usually very bad at taking their medicines on a regular basis, especially when they are using a lot of the drug or are on a “binge.” This poor taking of HIV medicines leads to the virus becoming resistant to the medicines and makes it harder to treat the HIV. Others studies have shown that people who use crack or cocaine progress to or develop AIDS faster.

**If you have further questions, be sure to talk to your primary care provider or your health educator or nurse.**



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