By The Professionals At Evolve Indy

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3. How Addictive Is Cocaine? Learn the Impacts on Your Brain & Body

Cocaine is a dangerous and powerful stimulant drug, commonly snorted as a white powder, and can cause a range of effects, including a very intense high. The sensation becomes addictive, making people want to take it over and over again until they develop a very harmful addiction, which will require a method of suitable treatment. Repeated cocaine use can lead to addiction, and in the treatment of addiction, we must remember that it is a devastating brain disease. Regardless of how it impacts them physically, many users of cocaine cannot stop even if they want to, all because of the nature of the addiction, in combination with the length of cocaine high. As the "high" does not last very long, people take the drug over and over again to keep feeling good.

Why Is Cocaine So Addictive?

There are many reasons why cocaine is addictive, and apart from the high it provides to regular or recreational users, cocaine causes dopamine to build up in the brain. Every drug changes the way the brain works, and dopamine, also known as the brain's happy chemical, is the neurotransmitter that makes people feel good when they do something they enjoy. While dopamine is usually recycled back into the nerve cells (also called neurons), stimulants like cocaine stop the dopamine from being recycled, which "trains" the brain to repeat the behavior to get the dopamine reward. Therefore, cocaine is repeatedly taken.

With prolonged use, cocaine can disrupt how the dopamine system works, which is where an individual will develop a tolerance, and will therefore need to take more of the drug to get the desired effect. It can get to the point where a user may take the drug purely to feel normal. Additionally, if the high of the cocaine wears off, people can experience what is known as a "crash," which can consist of symptoms such as exhaustion or anxiety, as well as other withdrawal symptoms including depression, paranoia, irritability, and vivid nightmares.

How Cocaine Stimulates "Positive Reinforcement"

As with many other addictions, cocaine addiction can develop due to this psychological process known as "positive reinforcement:" Positive reinforcement causes a pattern of behavior to develop through the release of dopamine. The idea of positive reinforcement creates a pattern of behavior to develop by offering a reward for that behavior. Dopamine can make users feel some of the following:

- Excited.
- Energetic.
- Confident.
- Euphoric.
- Chatty.
- Happy.
- Alert.

Because of these pleasurable effects, people want to take cocaine again and again to experience those feelings, but this is where an addiction develops and treatment becomes necessary.

Cocaine and Its Combination With Other Drugs

Cocaine is also consumed alongside substances like amphetamines, heroin, and alcohol, which are all addictive, and can increase the overall level of positive reinforcement when taking cocaine. As a result, the feelings associated with high levels of dopamine will also impact your ability to tolerate other drugs and alcohol. Therefore, in order to recreate that level of positive reinforcement, users take it over and over again until they become more dependent on it, as it helps them function.

The Symptoms of the Effects of Cocaine Addiction

Because cocaine is a signal that creates these feelings of euphoria and happiness because of the dopamine release, long-term use can have detrimental impacts on the brain and the body, which can include some of the following:

Anxiety and Paranoia

Cocaine-induced paranoia is very common for chronic users. The level of anxiety or paranoia depends on the amount of the drug, the duration of the use, and the overall quality. Prolonged use of cocaine can also result in what is commonly referred to as "cocaine psychosis" or "cocaine-induced psychosis." Psychosis is a symptom of several mental health conditions which can cause delusions and hallucinations.

Risky Behaviors

The nature of taking cocaine in a social setting, as well as the excessive feelings of euphoria, can make an individual feel invincible. Therefore, users can take part in risky behaviors that they wouldn't normally do.

Cognitive Impairment

Long-term cocaine use can cause users to memorise simple items, and impact decision-making abilities. Research has suggested that the cognitive deficit could explain why cocaine users persist with the drug or return to it after abstinence.

As you can see, the addiction to cocaine is not just to do with the drug itself, but there are a variety of factors that can impact anybody individually. Because of its ability to impact the brain and the body in different ways, combined with the increase of tolerance level, this is a dangerous recipe. For users of cocaine, it is crucial to take part in a holistic method of treatment, such as an outpatient program or partial hospitalisation. Cocaine is a devastating substance that harms the user but also causes families and relationships to fracture.

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