

Cocaine : gay men, sex and drugs / Terrence Higgins Trust.

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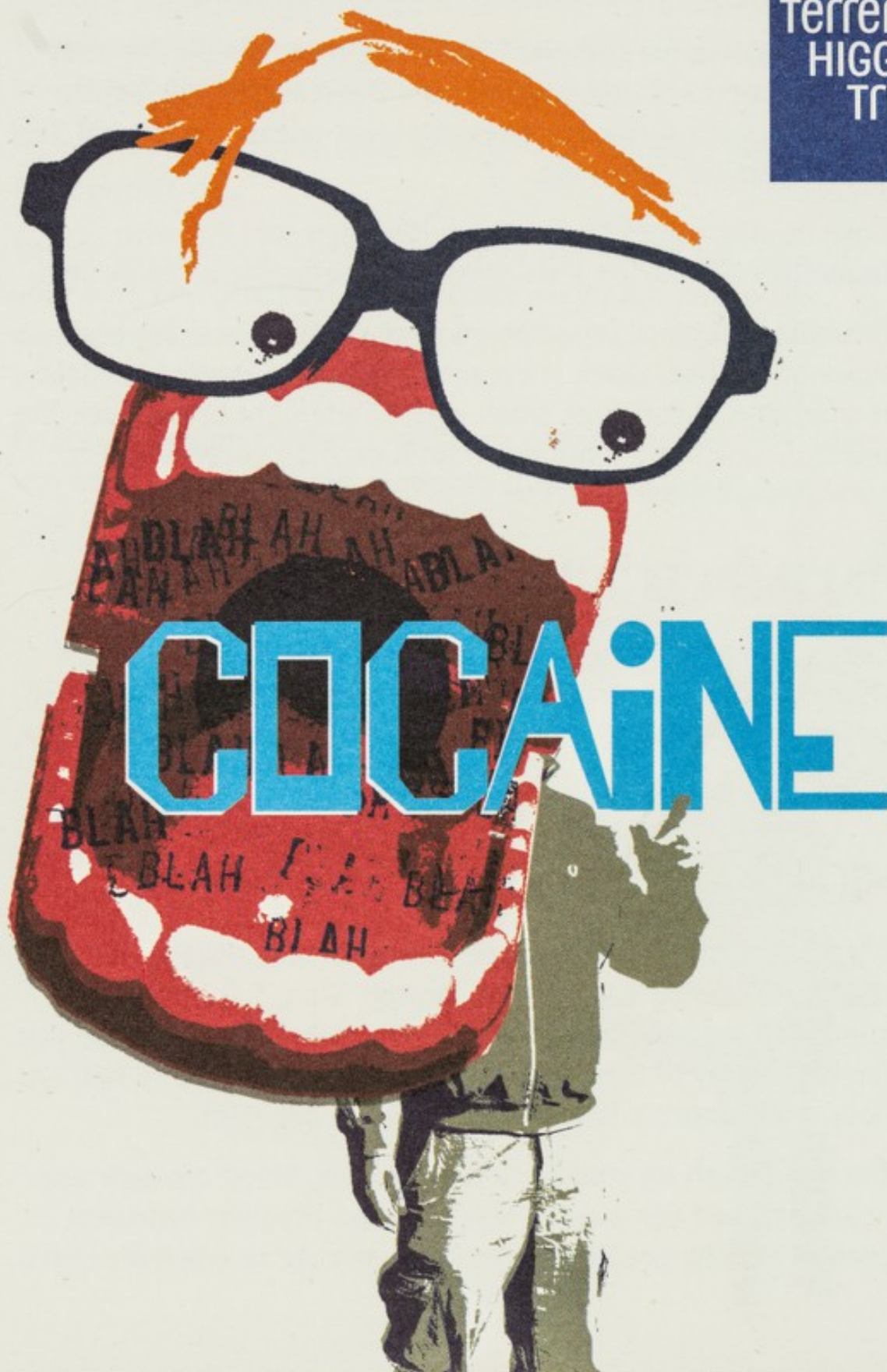
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Gay men, sex and drugs

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WHAT'S THE SCORE?

Cocaine is also known as: coke, Charlie, C, snow, blow, a toot, or Bolivian/Peruvian/Columbian marching powder.

Coke's a powerful stimulant (meaning it speeds up the body and its functions) and is made from the leaves of the South American coca shrub. It makes the brain release its natural 'feel good' chemical dopamine.

Coke usually comes as a powder. It's often sold cut with impurities like baking soda, sugar, amphetamine or painkillers.

Freebase and crack (also known as rocks or stones) are both types of cocaine. Crack is cocaine that's been treated to make it smokable. It comes as small, dirty white/light brown rock-like pieces. Crack has a more powerful high than cocaine and is seen as even more addictive.

TAKING COCAINE/CRACK

Coke's normally divided into lines on a smooth surface, then snorted through a straw or rolled up bank note. Other ways of taking it are smoking it or rubbing it into the gums or arsehole.

Crack is smoked in a pipe, glass tube, plastic bottle or from foil.

HIGHS AND LOWS

A hit with either coke or crack comes on fast, usually within a minute, making you feel exhilarated, alert, full of energy, confident, sociable, talkative and physically strong. It stops you feeling hungry or tired and kills pain. Effects last up to half an hour if you snort it (less if it's smoked or injected).

The drugs push up your body temperature, blood pressure and heartbeat, and can cause chest pain and irregular heartbeat even in healthy people. People who use coke or crack are much

more likely to have a heart attack than people who don't use them. They're also linked to strokes and seizures.

Come down (or 'crash') symptoms include feeling down, rough, agitated, tired and with a craving for more of the drug.

Sudden death is more likely with large doses but smaller doses can kill, especially if someone has a sensitivity to the drug.

A LONG TERM RELATIONSHIP?

Tolerance builds to both cocaine and crack, with more needed to get the same high. Coke has a reputation for being more addictive than most chems (and crack is seen as even more addictive). The drugs can cause lasting damage to how the brain works and, given the drugs' price, becoming addicted can ruin you financially.

Using cocaine or crack for a long time (or large doses) can cause panic attacks, hallucinations, depression, paranoia and psychosis. Snorting coke can over time destroy the lining of the nose and septum (the skin between nostrils).

COKE/CRACK WITH OTHER DRUGS

Alcohol – using booze together with coke or crack makes the bad effects of both worse and can give you the illusion of being sober when you're drunk. These drugs mix together in the body with alcohol to make cocaethylene, a toxin that damages the brain, liver and heart. This is the reason for the bigger risk of sudden death in people using alcohol and coke or crack together.

Speed, crystal, E, Viagra – mixing these drugs with coke or crack means even more pressure on the heart and circulation, with a bigger risk of stroke, heart attack, etc.

Anti-depressants – taking cocaine or crack when you're on some anti-depressants can cause 'serotonin syndrome'.

This could be dangerous and the symptoms are feeling agitated, a fast heartbeat, sweating and muscle spasms and not being able to sleep. Urgent medical help is needed. If you're on antidepressants check with a doctor before using these drugs.

HIV drugs – as the body processes these differently than cocaine or crack, there are no known dangerous interactions.

USEFUL TO KNOW

If you share straws or bank notes to snort coke tiny amounts of blood could go from the lining of one person's nose to another. This might possibly spread viruses in blood such as hepatitis C. The same could happen if crack pipes are passed from a mouth with ulcers or burns to another person's mouth.

Rubbing coke into the arse hole will make it numb and irritate the skin. This makes it more likely someone picks up or passes on infections, including HIV.

Rougher, longer sex sessions mean more risk of condoms breaking, so putting on a fresh one after fucking for about 30 minutes is recommended.

These drugs make the heart beat harder and push up blood pressure, so should be avoided if you've got high blood pressure or a heart condition.

They should be avoided by people with a history of mental health problems too.

THE LAW

Cocaine and crack are Class A drugs.

Possession can mean up to seven years in prison and/or an unlimited fine. Intending to supply cocaine (including giving it to mates) can mean up to life in prison and/or an unlimited fine.

SEX ON COKE/CRACK

Both drugs can make you feel physically strong, horny, more sexually aggressive or confident, and with more stamina for longer sessions. Your sense of touch can be heightened, and you might get longer, stronger orgasms.

As your inhibitions are lowered you might be more likely to have unsafe sex.

The drugs' pain-killing effect can lead to rougher sex, making your cock and arse sore or bleed. You might not notice this damage but it makes it easier for HIV, hepatitis C and other infections to be passed on.

Problems getting hard-ons, difficulty coming and less sex drive can be other side effects, especially if the dose is big or you take it for a long time.



MORE INFO

If you'd like to talk to someone with lots of experience of drug-related issues, there's:

One-2-One counselling with a drugs counsellor at **Terrence Higgins Trust's** London offices. It's **free** of charge and to see if this would be useful for you, call our **Wellbeing Service** on **0207 812 1777**.

Or you can ask one of the **LADS** outreach team (identifiable in venues and cruising areas by their LADS stand, t-shirts and ID badges) about speaking to our drugs worker.

Also, check out www.tht.org.uk / **DRUG F*CKED**

Antidote

A London service gay and bisexual men concerned about their alcohol or drug use can make use of, with weekly drop-in, one-to-one counselling, support groups and more. Call **020 7287 8743** or go to www.thehungerford.org/antidote.asp

Talk To Frank

Information and support around alcohol and drug use. Call the 24 hour helpline on **0800 77 66 00** or contact by email, details from their website. Also, check out the 'need help' section of the site, www.talktofrank.com

Cocaine Anonymous

Call **0800 612 0225** (10am-10pm every day) or go to www.cauk.org.uk