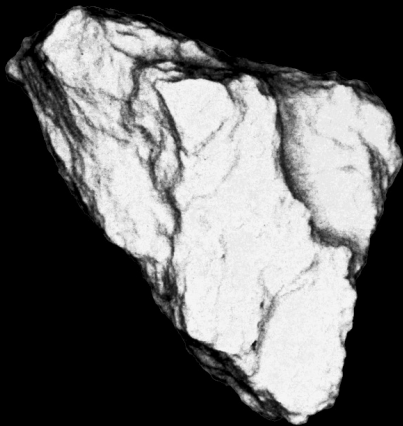


CRACK

+ speedballing



Introduction

This booklet aims to describe the problems that come with smoking and injecting crack.

It will help you identify and understand some of the problems that crack causes. For those not ready to stop using, we have included advice about reducing the harm that crack use causes

We cannot cover all of the problems caused by crack cocaine use. If you feel you may need help to stop, you can seek advice and support from a drug service.

The advice in this booklet applies equally to anyone injecting cocaine powder.



Injecting crack is much more dangerous than smoking it. If you don't inject crack: **don't start!**

If you share anyone else's injecting equipment, you put yourself at very high risk of getting viruses such as:

- hepatitis C;
- hepatitis B; and
- HIV.

If you only smoke crack, you'll have almost no risk of getting these viruses (other than by sexual transmission).

If you do inject, then make sure you don't share – or accidentally reuse – someone else's syringes.

There are several reasons why injecting with crack or cocaine is very harmful:

- people often have periods where they inject it a lot over a short period of time;
- the local anaesthetic effect means you won't feel the increased damage that digging around causes;
- cocaine damages surrounding body tissue; and
- cocaine slows healing by causing the blood vessels to narrow, reducing the blood flow.

For these reasons it makes even more sense to:

- avoid injecting crack;
- avoid always using the same injecting site;
- wash your hands before injecting;
- clean the injecting site with soap and water or an alcohol gel/swab before you inject; and
- give yourself frequent breaks from injecting.

Needle exchange

Frequent injecting of crack or cocaine dramatically increases skin and vein damage and you'll be more likely to run out of injecting equipment.

**If you inject more often
- get more injecting equipment!**

If for any reason you can't get clean equipment, make sure you clean the kit you have, and only re-use your own (there is a Harm Reduction Works film called 'cleaning works' available on DVD and YouTube that shows you how to do this).

Inject slowly

Injecting cocaine causes veins to become narrowed making injecting even more difficult to do without harm.

If you can find a vein, make sure you inject slowly: injecting faster than the blood flow results in a 'miss', wasting the drug, and causing more sores.

Injecting crack, whether alone or in speedballs (with heroin), really does destroy your veins.

Reducing injecting damage

You should try to allow time for your injecting site to heal by having complete breaks or by smoking instead.

If you are homeless and injecting, think about the location of where you're injecting. Is it clean enough? How good is the lighting? Are you worried that someone is likely to catch you?

Injecting in public places can cause you to rush, take more risks and cause you more harm.

Chasing

The less risky way of using crack is to chase it on foil.

If you usually combine crack and heroin in a speedball or snowball, you can do the same thing on foil.

Chasing won't be quite as intense as injecting, but it will last for longer and the chances of an overdose are lower.



Lung damage

Smoking crack can cause irritation and damage to the lungs, and sometimes that damage can be severe.

You can reduce your chances of getting serious problems by:

- setting limits in advance on how much you're going to smoke. In reality this can be difficult, but is more likely to be achieved if you buy it in smaller amounts, rather than getting enough to 'last a few days' and finding that it all went in a long binge;
- having regular breaks in use to give your body (and mind) a rest; and
- getting medical advice and help as soon as you feel a problem (if your breathing is wheezy or painful for example) – usually this will be after a period of heavy use, when the numbing effects of the cocaine have worn off.

Keeping control: breaks

If you use crack heavily and continuously, then breaks WILL happen, either because you:

- run out of money;
- get arrested;
- lose the support of family or friends;
- end up in hospital because of physical or psychiatric problems; or
- get ill.

It makes a lot of sense to plan the breaks for yourself rather than wait until something or someone else stops you.

Keeping control: planning your use

If you plan for regular periods where you don't use, you can be more in control of what happens to you and it will make the bad things listed above much less likely to happen.

You should aim to:

- smoke rather than inject;
- have some days where you don't use (you are more likely to be successful if you try one day using followed by a day off, rather than a week using followed by a week off)
- not always have crack available;
- avoid dealing;
- not use crack as a support mechanism when things go wrong; and
- be aware of warning signs that things are getting out of control, such as not doing something important because at the time using crack was more attractive.

Stopping for good

If you find - when you use again after a break - that you always end up in the same mess you did last time, then it might be time to stop telling yourself that you can control it.

For some people the only realistic control is to stop.

Speedballing (taking heroin and cocaine together)

There are no problems that are unique to mixing heroin and cocaine – you can get all of them in other ways, but regular injection of speedballs greatly increases the risks of:

- significant damage to the veins and skin;
- overdose; and
- becoming HIV or hep C positive.

If you 'speedball' regularly, it's not a question of if you are going to get problems, but when.

Talk to your local drug service about the help they can give.

The first edition of this booklet was published in 2010 for the Department of Health, as part of the Harm Reduction Works campaign which was one element of the Reducing Drug Related Deaths Action Plan.

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