So, taking cocaine is all about good times – feeling confident, talking funny nonsense with your mates and making your nights out last longer.

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But what about the bad times? Like when you are feeling paranoid, the next day comedown or the nights when all you can think about is your next line?

Cocaine can make you feel good, but it’s very addictive and it can easily become a habit that controls your life. And it’s not as safe as you may think it is – there are some serious risks to your health as well as to your friendships, family life and future.

If you are thinking about taking cocaine or if you already use it, then this is for you. It explains what cocaine does to you – both mentally and physically – as well as the risks, the law and where you can get further help and information.

For more info and confidential advice you can call **FRANK on 0800 77 66 00** or go to **talktofrank.com**
Cocaine is also called blast, blow, booth, c, cola, charlie, coke, divits, ivory flakes, nose candy, percy, railers, ringer, snow, toot, white or white dust.

Cocaine is a white powder made from the leaves of the South American coca plant. The chopped and crushed leaves are mixed with solvents like petrol, then treated with various chemicals, such as sulphuric acid. Kerosene is used to extract the crude cocaine, which receives further chemical treatment. The final product is the cocaine salt, also known as ‘powder’ cocaine. More chemicals are needed to convert the salt form to freebase or ‘crack’ cocaine, which usually looks like small lumps or ‘rocks’.

Cocaine increases the levels of the chemical, dopamine, which is present in the gap between nerve cells by blocking its removal back in to the cells. This ‘flooding’ of dopamine overexcites the receptors that are present on many brain cells, causing hyperactive and stimulant brain effects, as well as powerfully activating the ‘reward pathway’ that is involved in feeling ‘high’ and in developing addiction. This stimulant effect also puts extra strain on the heart.
In the short term, cocaine stimulation can make you feel confident and wide awake. But repeated use can cause agitated behaviour, mood swings, severe addiction and heart attacks.

Cocaine powder is soluble in body fluids and blood. It is usually chopped up with a credit card or razor blade and snorted through a straw or a rolled up bank note. But it can be rubbed onto the gums, bombed (swallowed) or prepared for injection. It is less easy to smoke than 'crack' cocaine and so, snorted, its effects are powerful but generally less intense than crack.

'Crack' and 'freebase' cocaine can be heated and smoked in a pipe. Smoking the crack gets it to the brain very rapidly and this is associated with a particularly rapid and euphoric high, followed by a quick come down and often a strong craving for more. If injected it is first converted to the soluble salt form.
how pure is it?

Cocaine seized by the police in 2006 was on average only 35% pure. Cocaine is cut with other ingredients to increase the profit margins of drug dealers. It probably won't be cut with talc, Vim or rat poison – that's a bit of an urban myth. But it could be cut with other drugs and chemicals. These include benzocaine (a pain reliever), phenacetin (an anaesthetic until it was linked to cancer) and lignocaine (a local anaesthetic). All of these can make your gums and mouth go numb – this can fool you into thinking that you have bought ‘high quality’ cocaine. Another substance used is tetramisole, a drug given to pets to expel or destroy tapeworms.

You never know how pure cocaine is, which means you don't know how strong it is or what other drugs you may be taking and their side effects.
Cocaine is a Class A drug. The maximum penalty for possession is seven years in prison or an unlimited fine.

For dealing – which includes giving or selling cocaine to your mates – it’s life in prison and an unlimited fine or both. Possession and dealing are both treated very seriously by the police. And even if you are under 18 you can still be prosecuted.

If you have a criminal record, it is harder to get a job and if you want to go abroad, you’ll find that some countries will not let you in.
the good, the bad and the ugly

Cocaine can change your personality. It affects the way you feel about yourself, the way you feel about others and the way that others see you.

It can make you feel good about yourself:
> confident
> excited
> alert
> energised
> like you want to talk non-stop
> sexually aroused

But it can make you feel bad:
> agitated or twitchy
> nervous and paranoid that people are talking about you
> upset because no one is listening to you because they are talking so much
And it can make you behave in an ugly way:
- arrogant and loud
- aggressive
- talking over everyone
- only interested in doing your next line

How do you look?
You might feel confident and gorgeous but chances are you'll be:
- sweating
- pale
- staring
- grinding your teeth

“I do feel more confident chatting up women but I know that I look a bit mad and sweaty sometimes.”
Paul, 19