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HSC Public Health Agency
Project supported by the PHA


Understanding the Misuse of Cocaine and Crack Cocaine



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Housekeeping


- Breaks
- Microphones
- Internet connections
- Confidentiality
- Questions/comments



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Housekeeping

- Breaks
- Toilets and exits
- Fire drills
- Mobile phones
- Confidentiality



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Course Objectives

By the end of today, you will be able to:

- Describe the prevalence of cocaine and "crack" cocaine misuse in Northern Ireland
- Identify ways these drugs are misused and their effects
- Identify risks and harms for the user associated with the misuse of cocaine and crack cocaine




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Course Objectives

By the end of today, you will be able to:

- Explain key harm reduction strategies
- Identify local substance misuse services



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1 Introduction

What is the prevalence of cocaine and "crack" cocaine misuse?

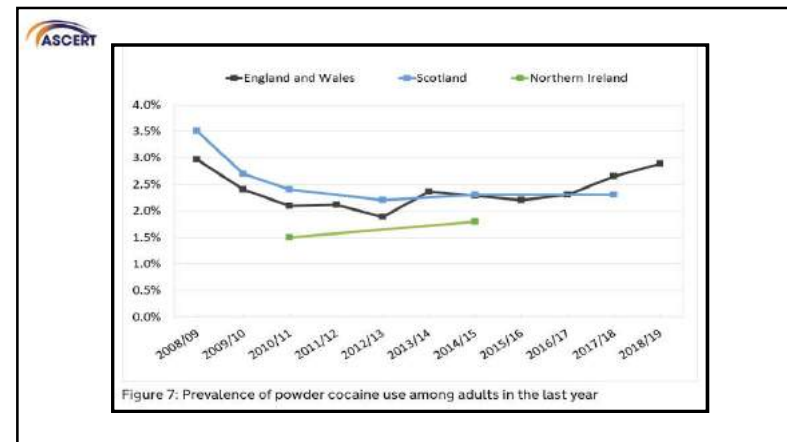
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Cocaine Use in the General Population

Powder cocaine is the most commonly used stimulant in the UK, and the 2nd most prevalent drug overall.

Northern Ireland	England and Wales	Scotland
○ 2015: 1.8%	○ 2018/2019: 2.9%	○ 2019/2020: 3.0%
○ 2010/2011: 1.5%	○ 2008/2009: 3.0%	○ 2008/2009: 2.3%


Sources: All Ireland Drug Prevalence Survey 2014/2015; Crime Survey for England and Wales 2018/2019; Scottish Crime and Justice Survey 2019/2020



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Cocaine Use in the General Population

- Data for 2017/2018 from England and Wales suggests that prevalence of cocaine use amongst adults in the UK was the highest of all European countries where figures were available*
 - Reflected in wastewater analysis data from several European countries (including London and Bristol)
- Powder cocaine was the 3rd most commonly used drug among people aged 16 – 25 in England and Wales



Sources: European Drug Report 2019; Wastewater Analysis and Drugs – A European Multi-City Study (EMCDDA, 2022)

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2 How Is Cocaine Used?

How do people use cocaine/crack, and how might it affect someone?


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Routes of Administration for Cocaine

- People using cocaine/crack primarily administer these drugs:
 - Orally (swallowing or rubbing on gums)
 - Intranasal (snorting – inhaled through the nostrils and absorbed into the bloodstream through nasal tissues)
 - Intravenously (dissolving into water and injecting it directly into the bloodstream; heightened intensity)
 - Inhalation – (inhaling vapour/smoke into lungs via smoking; absorption into bloodstream is almost as fast as injection)

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GUIDANCE: Scenes of drug use

How Does Cocaine Affect Us?


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3 Risks and Harms Associated With Cocaine Use

What are the risks and harms associated with cocaine/crack use?


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Risks and Harms Associated With Cocaine Use



- Cocaine/crack is a highly addictive stimulant drug used by 14 – 21 million people worldwide
- Unfortunately, many people suffer unpleasant consequences as a result of their cocaine use

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Gastrointestinal disease

Overdose

Respiratory illness

Cardiovascular disease

Mood disorders

HIV infection

Hepatitis B infection

Hepatitis C infection

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High blood pressure

Slow reaction time

Memory loss

Seizures

Altered sleep patterns

Polydrug misuse


Stroke

Weight loss

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Possible Short-Term Side Effects of Cocaine Use


- Almost immediate and can last a few minutes – an hour
 - Feelings of euphoria, alertness, restlessness, and/or energy
 - Decreased need for food or sleep
 - More talkative
 - Dilated pupils



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Possible Short-Term Side Effects of Cocaine Use

- Almost immediate and can last a few minutes – an hour
 - Increased heart rate, blood pressure, and body temperature
 - Anxiety, panic, paranoia, tremors, and potentially erratic to violent behaviours
 - Abdominal pain and nausea



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Possible Long-Term Side Effects of Cocaine Use



- Cardiovascular damage (blood clots, heart attacks, stroke, angina, increased blood pressure, arrhythmia)
- Sinus and/or oral damage (septal perforations or holes, collapse of nose structure, breathing problems, palatal perforations)
- Respiratory problems (black sputum, cough, wheezing, pain)
- Coma

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Possible Long-Term Side Effects of Cocaine Use



- Brain damage and other neurological issues
 - Mini-strokes
 - Seizures
 - Cerebral atrophy (brain shrinking)
 - Inflammation and high fever
 - Changes to mood (irritability, anxiety, depression)
 - Tremors and muscle weakness
 - Changes to ability to make decisions, solve problems, understand information, learn, and memorise

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4 Harm Reduction Strategies

How can we work with people using cocaine/crack in order to reduce the harm they might experience?

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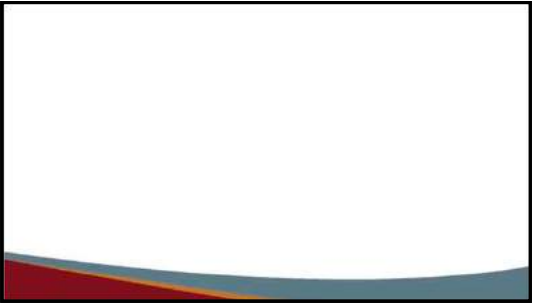
Harm reduction can be defined as a range of strategies and interventions designed to **reduce the harm** caused by drug use.

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Harm Reduction

- Not primarily concerned with achieving abstinence – goal is achieving reduction in risk
- Any reduction in risk is highlighted and reinforced
- Risk can be reduced while, at the same time, pleasurable and/or desired effects can be attained
- Similarly, unpleasant and/or undesirable effects can be avoided

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The Rationale Behind Harm Reduction


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Harm Reduction for People Using Cocaine

- Best tip – stop cocaine use completely
 - Even the purest cocaine carries the risk of overdose, triggering mental illness, dangerous cardiac and neurological consequences, and unpleasant withdrawal symptoms
- If someone chooses to use cocaine, a few harm reduction strategies can reduce risk
 - Harm reduction will better your chances of coming through cocaine use unscathed – it won't make it safe to keep using

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Harm Reduction for People Using Cocaine: Avoid Bingeing




- Bingeing = taking the drug multiple times in one session
 - Half-life of cocaine = 2-4 hours (short for a stimulant)
 - Greatest risk of overdose comes from topping off your dose during this time period
 - Reduces severity of crash
- Best chance at a painless recovery and reduced risk of addiction → let the drug wear off, rest, and don't use again the next day

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Harm Reduction for People Using Cocaine: Plan Ahead for the Crash


- Cocaine is well-known for the crash that happens after coming down from a high
 - Unpleasant state marked by physical and mental exhaustion (and, often, a low mood)
- Crash is part of the drug's rebound effect and the worst of it only lasts 45 mins – 1 hour
 - Using more cocaine, alcohol, or other drugs to avoid withdrawal will only increase the intensity of the symptoms when they catch up to you




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Harm Reduction for People Using Cocaine: Plan Ahead for the Crash


- Better approach:
 - Get some sleep
 - Plan a day of rest ahead of time if you know you're likely to binge
 - Drink plenty of water/juice and eat some food (even if you don't feel like it)




 **Harm Reduction for People Using Cocaine: Take Care of Your Nose**


- Repeatedly snorting cocaine can cause damage to the delicate tissues inside of your nose
 - Can potentially eat a hole in your septum after awhile
- Harm reduction strategies for reducing nasal damage
 - Diluting cocaine with water
 - Inserting the straw deeper into the nasal passage so cocaine doesn't get stuck in nose hairs
 - Alternating nostrils
 - Ensuring cocaine is chopped into fine powder
 - Taking a break from cocaine to allow the body to recover from tissue damage

 **Harm Reduction for People Using Cocaine: Be Smart About Supplies**





- Sharing anything that you use cocaine with can lead to infection
 - Snorting straws can pick up small particles that may carry infectious diseases
 - A pipe with a broken piece may cut you unexpectedly
 - Sharing pipes and straws puts you at risk of oral herpes and other diseases

 **Harm Reduction for People Using Cocaine: Be Smart About Supplies**



- If you smoke cocaine
 - Be cautious about burning yourself
 - Avoid using makeshift pipes or foil from bottles, cans, or other sources as you may be inhaling harmful chemicals
 - Can damage your lungs more than the cocaine

 **Harm Reduction for People Using Cocaine: Be Smart About Supplies**



- If you've never injected cocaine, it's best not to start
 - Risks of abscesses from using the same injection site and missing a vein are too great
 - Avoid skin popping – cocaine isn't well-absorbed this way, so it's not worth it
 - Not wise to inject any drug with needles that you are not 100% certain are sterile or that have been used by someone else

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Harm Reduction for People Using Cocaine: Know the Overdose Signs

- Cocaine can be cut with all sorts of harmful additives, including poisons or other stimulants
 - Best to start slow anytime you buy a new supply to test out its effects
- Speedballing (using an opiate and cocaine at the same time) can lead to overdose
 - Your body may respond unpredictably to this combination – best to avoid it
 - Also goes for combining cocaine with alcohol or any other drugs
- An overdose of cocaine can lead to heart attack or stroke

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Signs of Cocaine Overdose

The infographic illustrates various signs of cocaine overdose. It features a central image of a blue book with white powder on it, flanked by two syringes. Surrounding this central image are seven icons with labels: a person having a seizure, a person with chest pain, a person with difficulty breathing, a person vomiting, a person with foaming at the mouth, a person who is unconscious, and a person with a blue or extremely pale face.

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Harm Reduction for People Using Cocaine: Get Help for Mental Health Issues

- Using cocaine to deal with emotional problems like depression or social anxiety (i.e. self-medicating) tends to make these problems worse over time
 - Might seem to help while you're high, but this is temporary
 - Problems will still be there when you come down
 - Better to talk to a GP about other things that can help (e.g. medications, therapy)
- Cocaine can also induce or trigger psychosis (problems perceiving things realistically) – treatable

A photograph of a young woman with long dark hair, wearing a dark top, looking upwards and to the right. She is standing in front of a wall covered in colorful graffiti.

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Harm Reduction for People Using Cocaine: Take Care of Yourself

A photograph of two small pink bowls filled with yogurt, topped with fresh blueberries and granola. A white spoon is placed in each bowl.

- Cocaine is a stimulant → disrupted sleeping and eating patterns
- Important to
 - Eat regular, healthy meals
 - Get enough sleep
 - Have good hygiene habits
- It's possible to stay healthy while using cocaine occasionally, but frequent use can impact your physical health → difficulty with work and relationships

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Treatment



- Needs to be tailored to the individual and medically directed
 - Tapering the drug dosage to manage withdrawal
 - Substitution of more appropriate/less addictive substance Evidence-based talking therapies (e.g. CBT)
 - Support to improve self-management of symptoms (e.g. Pain Toolkit)

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5 Signposting

Who is available to help?

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NIDACTS

Northern Ireland Drug and Alcohol Coordination Teams

drugsandalcoholni.info




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Family Support NI

familysupportni.gov.uk


A directory of various support services (e.g. mental health, finances) and registered childcare services in NI




 **Here2Help App**

Directory app providing information on support services, such as charitable organisations and helplines

Available on Apple App Store and Google Play (Android)



 **Thanks!**

Any questions?

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