

Cocaine and the Heart

How does cocaine affect the heart?

Cocaine is a short-acting, powerful stimulant. It acts directly on the heart muscle, brain, blood vessels, and nerve tissue. The effects are felt almost immediately. Cocaine may cause:

- fast or irregular heartbeats
- high blood pressure
- spasm and narrowing of the arteries that lead to the heart muscle
- a heart attack or stroke
- death.

How are problems related to cocaine diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider will review your symptoms, examine you, and ask about your use of drugs. You may also have tests such as CT scans, head X-rays, or an electrocardiogram (ECG). Your blood and urine will be tested. (Cocaine can remain in urine for many hours after you have used the drug.)

How are they treated?

The fast heart rate, chest pain, and palpitations usually get better as soon as the cocaine is out of your system. Heart attacks and strokes caused by cocaine are treated in the same way as those caused by other problems. Hospitalization, medicines, and close supervision are needed to limit any damage to the heart. Unfortunately, people may die from cocaine intoxication before medical help can be called.

How can I take care of myself?

The best way to help yourself is to see your healthcare provider and to make and follow plans to stop taking cocaine. You can get more information from:

The National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information (NCADI)
Phone: 1-800-729-6686
Web site: <http://ncadi.samhsa.gov>.

Written by Donald L. Warkentin, MD.

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