

# Using alcohol and cocaine together: why it's more dangerous

Information and advice for patients

## Toxicology

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### What happens when alcohol and cocaine is used together?

#### A new, harmful chemical is created

When alcohol and cocaine are taken together, your body makes a chemical called **cocaethylene**.

#### Cocaethylene

- Stays in the body longer than alcohol or cocaine alone
- Is more toxic than alcohol or cocaine alone
- Puts extra strain on the heart and other organs including the liver and the brain

#### Serious risks to the heart

Using alcohol and cocaine together can:

- Make the heart beat faster
- Raise blood pressure
- This can increase the chance of: heart attacks, dangerous heart rhythm problems, collapse, sudden death

Cocaethylene increases the risks of these conditions occurring.

Some medicines you get on prescription can make cocaethylene more dangerous, especially heart medicines and drugs that affect the brain, like antidepressants.

#### Higher risk of stroke and harm to the brain

Cocaethylene can reduce blood flow to the brain, which increases the risk of:

- Stroke
- Loss of consciousness
- Long-term brain damage

## **Strain on the liver**

Cocaethylene is linked to:

- Liver damage
- Scarring of the liver (cirrhosis)

People who use alcohol and cocaine together are more likely to have multiple health problems at the same time

## **Greater risk of serious illness or death**

- People who use both substances together are more likely to:
- Need emergency medical care
- Be admitted to hospital or intensive care
- Die suddenly - the risk is much higher than with cocaine alone

The danger increases when the amount of alcohol and cocaine used together is increased

## **What are the benefits of stopping alcohol and cocaine use?**

### **Physical health improvements**

- Improved liver, heart and brain health
- Better sleep
- Improved immune system

### **Mental and emotional health**

- Reduced anxiety and depression
- Lower stress levels

### **Social and personal**

- Better relationships
- Increased productivity

### **Long term benefits**

- Lower risk of chronic diseases
- Saving money

Quitting alcohol and cocaine is a powerful step toward better health, improved relationships, and a more fulfilling life. While the journey may be challenging, the benefits are substantial and long lasting.

If you or someone you know is considering stopping, remember that support is available, and you will feel better if you make changes to your lifestyle.

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## Further reading

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