

Cocaine Examined

By Jim Rachels



Cocaine is a naturally occurring substance that comes from the coca plant. Coca, the plant needed to produce cocaine is found in Central and South America and has been around and grown there for over 3500 years. Natives would chew the leaves for an energetic euphoric feeling. It was also used in religious ceremonies.

Nowadays, when people think of cocaine, they associate it with a drug for wealthy people, extravagance, violence, and gangs. But in the late 1800s people associated cocaine with different medical purposes. It was commonly used as a local anesthetic. This was considered a great discovery and was widely used in the medical community. It was actually hailed as a medical wonder drug. In the 1800s people like Sigmund Freud and even the fictional character, Sherlock Holmes were using cocaine. It was even in the original recipe for Coca-Cola. Some effects the user would feel include euphoria, heightened alertness, decreased appetite and confidence.

In the early 1900s people began to see cocaine as more of a destructive, dangerous and addictive drug. It was no longer seen as the medical miracle it was originally touted as. The government in turn then started placing restrictions on the non-medical use of cocaine. All recreational use of cocaine was eventually made illegal.

From Drugabuse.com:

“Initially, labeling requirements for cocaine-containing products were enacted through the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906. Next, the **Harrison Narcotics Tax Act of 1914** imposed restrictions on the use of cocaine and other drugs and **made it illegal for physicians to prescribe cocaine or narcotics to addicts.**

Finally, the **Narcotic Drugs Import and Export Act of 1922** forbade the importation of cocaine and cocaine-containing products. With the passage of this law, cocaine was **essentially prohibited in the US for any non-medical uses**, and legal sources of the drug were severely restricted.”

Today, cocaine addiction has worsened. In the states, more than four million people use cocaine regularly. It is valued more than gold. It's a powerful stimulant that is one of the more expensive drugs available. Every year Americans spend thirty-seven billion dollars on cocaine. Cocaine has been becoming increasingly less expensive and this in turn has made it available to more people. It is no longer just a drug for the wealthy.

It gives the user energy and a euphoric feeling. The most common methods used to take the drug are snorting or smoking it and some users even cook it up and use it intravenously. One of the main dangers of using cocaine is that it increases the heart rate, putting too much stress on your heart. On average there are five thousand coke-related deaths every year.

Much of the coca leaves come from the valleys of Peru. Each year farmers produce over thirty-seven thousand tons. Most of what is produced finds its way into the American drug scene.

Cocaine begins with the farmers in South America who pick the coca leaves. It comes from three countries - Bolivia, Columbia and Peru. These farmers make very little money from this. Most farmers average around \$90 a day for their work. Many make just enough to survive. Each leaf needs to be picked by hand and this process can take quite some time.

In the cocaine business, you need people to do the production, you need some to handle exporting and logistics, and others to handle sales and distribution. Cocaine organizations are run just like legit businesses, with many jobs filled along the way in the supply chain. This is what makes cocaine so expensive. Everyone that is involved in helping get the product to market takes a piece of the profits.

The first step in the process of making cocaine is having the farmers pick their crops. The crops are grown in large areas covering much ground. Once they are picked they sell for about \$3 a kilo. It takes 1 ton of coca leaves to get one kilo of cocaine. For that ton of coca leaves, the farmers earn around \$500.

Once the leaves are picked they are then ready to begin the process of turning them into the finished product. They mix the coca leaves with various items, including cement, drain cleaner and gasoline. Many of these are dangerous to ingest on their own, let alone mixed together.

Most farmers sell the raw coca to makeshift labs which then make it into coca paste before selling it to the cartels. Some growers have begun to make their own labs and do the next step of the process themselves. This brings more income in. They will earn about \$900 per kilo of coca paste. It is then processed again with more chemicals to make it into the cocaine that everyone knows and is familiar with. The cartels can make as much as 100 times their initial investment. Once it's made into cocaine it is packaged up and ready to be shipped. In order to be shipped, it must be packaged the right way to conceal it. Many times it is packaged with everyday items that are shipped. This can be anything from children's toys to laptops, shoes and briefcases.

There is a lot of profit to make along the way in the supply chain. Its starting point for example can be Columbia. Here a kilo is worth \$2,500. Once it shipped from there the price goes up to around \$12,000-\$14,000 at the next stop along the way in Mexico. By the time it reaches places like California it can reach as high as \$25,000 for wholesale purchases and at times even more. The profit along each stop in the shipping process is determined by how much risk there is. The riskier the job the more money they make. And once it is in the hands of the people that will be selling it in small quantities on the streets the value of the cocaine goes up to \$80,000 a kilo.

To get the cocaine to the markets where it will be actually sold on the streets the dealers use many different types of transportation. They've been known to use boats, submarines, tunnels, cars and trucks to drive across the border. It's a dangerous job. Getting caught can mean a number of years in jail for the trafficker.

So what effect it is having on America and the population currently using cocaine? The effects that this drug has on people can be dangerous and life-threatening. Some of the short-term effects are increased heart rate, increased body temperature, increased blood pressure, paranoia, stomach issues, body twitches and anxiety. I myself have done plenty of cocaine in my life and remember getting almost all of them. The most dangerous of these symptoms are the ones that affect the heart. You are taking the chance of having heart complications, such as elevated heart rates which can easily lead to heart attacks.

Then there are the long-term effects of using cocaine. Your brain chemistry will actually change with continued use of the drug. The dopamine system is completely unstable and this leads to mood swings.

As much as governments are fighting this battle against drugs there is still plenty of cocaine being imported into the United States. The governments need to take some type of new approach in my mind if they are to truly make an impact on drug trafficking. We need to develop a better understanding of cocaine addiction and how we can help people who are addicted to this drug. If people are not using it the way they are now and we cut out the demand the supply will also dwindle. We need to attack this epidemic at its root cause which is addiction. Without an addiction to this, the sellers would have no one to sell to. We must find ways to deter people from using. The current system of arresting and putting addicts in prison does not work. Until we put a new system in place things will just continue on the way they are currently going. I hope that people in positions of power to make these decisions wake up to the epidemic that is sweeping our country. It is only with awareness and education that we can fight this battle and have a chance of winning.

