



# COCAINE

THE UGLY (SWEATY, PARANOID) TRUTH

Cocaine-related deaths have risen by 50% in recent years, but 25% of you still admit to taking it regularly.

**Catherine Gray** asks, what gives?

“Dessert?” After our huge Sunday lunch, I was expecting a lemon mousse or ice cream from my friend. “There we are.” Yes, she unveiled a beautiful Victoria sponge, but she also produced a bag of cocaine. I watched as four of my six friends happily snorted a line. Shocked? I can’t say I was: In the past few years I’ve seen cocaine quietly weave its way into my friends’ lives. From the friend who was a bag of nerves at her birthday until her ‘delivery’ arrived, to the friends who openly took it in the Portaloos at the polo; it’s just not unusual any more. Our anonymous survey on [GLAMOUR.com](http://GLAMOUR.com) confirms my suspicions: one in four readers now regularly uses cocaine. Recent Ministry of Justice statistics show that the number of women cautioned for possession has increased five-fold since 2002. The number of women seeking help for addiction has risen by 50% in the past two years. And latest figures show that cocaine-related deaths have risen by 50%.

Photographs by **Dennis Pedersen**

So why take the enormous risk? It seems the draw of chasing a cocktail with a line is the potent 'hit' of dopamine (the feel-good chemical) sent to the brain. David Smallwood, an addiction treatment manager at the North London Priory, explains: "Cocaine plus alcohol in the liver forms a chemical reaction called cocaethylene, which increases the pleasure boost to the brain." He says women who wind up doing a reckless 'what the hell?' line after a few too many glasses of wine find it takes their night to a whole new level, and then chase that buzz again and again, unaware that they could actually die from just one line.

When alcohol is absorbed into the bloodstream it works as a central nervous depressant, says Claudia Rubin, head of policy & communications at drugs advice service Release. "When cocaine is added, it causes the heart muscles to race, the blood supply to quicken, and prevents you breathing as well. The combination of alcohol and cocaine is toxic, especially to the liver, because one is a stimulant and the other is a sedative, so your body struggles to handle both effects."

"In my professional opinion," says Smallwood, "snorting cocaine is more dangerous than injecting heroin, yet it's seen as being almost on the same level as smoking a cigarette." He explains that cocaine is an anaesthetic, so you are actually anaesthetising your central nervous system. "Just one line could trigger a shutdown in your body, manifesting in a stroke or heart attack." Indeed, one in four of all heart attacks in people under 40 is caused by cocaine. Upgrading your buzz with "just one line" starts to look a lot more serious once you stare down the barrel of that statistic.

## OUT OF CONTROL

The rising levels of female alcoholism also play a part, since alcohol abuse and cocaine addiction often go hand in hand. "Addicts very often transfer one addiction for another," says Smallwood. "They start doing cocaine because it enables them to drink longer; and pretty soon they're starting the day with a shot of vodka and a line of cocaine." It sounds like something so alien to our lives; but this really could be the girl you sit next to at work or the woman who served you coffee this morning.

Apparently, there's also a cocaine, alcohol and sex love triangle. "Cocaine either turns you on enormously or completely turns you off," explains Smallwood. "For the half who get a sexual kick, they're now not only addicted to the cocaine/alcohol buzz, they're also hooked on the sex they're having. It erases all insecurities and ►

“One in four of all heart attacks in people under 40 is caused by cocaine”

## 5 things you didn't know about cocaine

### 1 You don't have to be carrying to be caught

Police are now distributing 'cocaine torches' to drug squads. "It looks just like a normal torch, but if it's pointed at a person's nose and mouth area, it shows up bright green if they've been using cocaine," says Superintendent Andy Towler from Cumbria Police.

### 2 It's in your wallet right now

It's estimated that virtually every banknote in circulation in Britain is contaminated with cocaine. Yes, it's a tiny amount, but it's there.

### 3 The UK is the European capital of cocaine

Last year we recorded the highest number of cocaine users in the EU for the fifth year running.

### 4 You can get hepatitis C

It's not just sharing needles that leads to the disease. Blood and mucus are easily transferred when sharing straws or banknotes to snort coke. "Serious users have regular nose bleeds," says Dr Ken Checinski, a senior consultant in addictive behaviour from drugs information and advice service Frank.

### 5 If you accidentally fall pregnant, you may have a 'crack baby'

"It's the first six to eight weeks after the fertilisation of pregnancy, when many women don't realise they're pregnant, that the face and the brain of your baby develops," says Dr Checinski. "That's when the foetus is the most susceptible to the mother taking cocaine, creating the physical and brain abnormalities that characterise 'crack babies'."

◀ inhibitions." The cruel irony is that even though the cocaine may trick you into feeling sexier, once you come down, you're smacked in the face with the fact that you've become much less desirable. Think back to the pictures of Mischa Barton's alleged 'coke bloat' face atop a skeletal body, creating a bizarre lollipop look. "The fluid accumulation in the face is due to all the cocaine going into the nose. It makes your blood pressure surge, and as it does so, your blood vessels constrict, making your face redder. Long-term users also develop scabs and sores," says Dr Ken Checinski, a senior consultant in addictive behaviour from drugs advice and information service Frank.

There are more gruesome physical effects: "Many people become incontinent because the impairment to the brain means they aren't able to recognise their body's needs," adds Dr Checinski. "There's also cocaine-related movement disorder, whereby users can't sit still, but are unaware of how strangely they're behaving. So, you could be sitting in a work meeting, unaware of the fact you're writhing and making the table vibrate with your tapping leg, while your colleagues wonder what on earth is wrong with you." Not the most professional look.

Yet cocaine continues to enjoy kudos. "It's thought of as a more glamorous, cleaner, smarterer ecstasy for the middle classes," explains Tom Feiling, author of *The Candy Machine: How Cocaine Took Over The World*. "If it was a marketing campaign for a brand, it would win awards for its genius execution. Cocaine isn't regarded as a class A at all, even though it is. It's something that's filtered down from the elite, and now everyone wants it."

The recession hasn't slowed our cocaine use, either. "Addictive personalities have a kamikaze edge,"

says Smallwood. "If you tell them not to do something, they'll do it more. If they're told not to fritter their money away, they'll gravitate towards doing so like a moth to a flame." He's concerned that the number of women coming to the Priors has levelled off in recent months. "I suspect it's because they fear that if they stick their hand up at work and admit that they have to go into rehab, they'll be next in line for redundancy."

The danger is that cocaine addiction is an ever-hungrier monster. "Letting it fester means you need to do more and more to get the same buzz. It's like being on a runaway train," adds Smallwood. Far from it being a city-boy drug, cocaine

# One POLICEWOMAN

said she  
was  
overworked  
and  
cocaine  
helped  
her  
do the  
housework

is now predominantly a female one. "It's on the wane with men," says Mark Fuller, owner of the Embassy nightclub. "They've realised that sitting on sticky seats with a bottle of vodka and six grams of coke doesn't make their dicks bigger. They seem to have lost the urge to show off with it."

## NO WAY OUT

Meanwhile, female use is going up as fast as male use is falling. "Women are more likely to get away with it as well," explains Fuller. "Our security always smell a rat when a bloke is in and out of the toilets all night, but girls go in and out of the toilets so frequently,

and go into stalls together anyway, that it's nearly impossible to tell whether they are powdering their noses in the cosmetic or the drug sense."

The tactics used by nightclubs – such as random searches or putting Vaseline on toilet cisterns – are easily foxed: women just hide the wraps of cocaine in their underwear and chop it up on their credit cards. Many celebrities also hide the drug in a custom-made locket, ▶

◀ *Cruel Intentions*-style, with a tiny spade that they can snort off.

The euphoric high (cocaine is like a very potent antidepressant, flooding your brain with serotonin) is followed by a crashing low. "Cocaine hangovers are like a normal hangover times ten," says Smallwood. "You feel the same tiredness and headache fug, but you also feel jittery, trembly and thoroughly paranoid." Assume everyone gets the Monday blues because of their delayed Saturday night hangover? Look again. It might be more to do with the two grams of cocaine they consumed.

## LOSING YOUR MIND

Even worse, cocaine messes with your grip on reality. "Everyone else may think you're a bloated, twitchy mess," says Feiling. (Paparazzi shots of Kerry Katona, who has admitted her past cocaine addiction, spring to mind). "But in the beautifully lit mirror that cocaine provides, you think you're gorgeous, skinny and magnetic." And the deeper you go, the deeper the ravine between reality and your cocaine-tinged view. Even scarier, the drug can be

a trigger for schizophrenia and suicide. And who could forget Danniella Westbrook's nose, which turned her into the poster girl for rehab? "Cocaine was first introduced as a general anaesthetic," explains Smallwood. "It literally anaesthetises your skin." So, as addicts snort it, they can't feel their nose burning away.

So insidious is the drug, even the people meant to be policing it can end up falling under its spell. "I interviewed a policewoman for my book who was a reformed addict," says Feiling. "She was overworked and said cocaine helped her do things like housework or going to the gym. When she told her employers, they were very sympathetic. She wasn't the first in her unit to come to them with the problem. She was treated more like an alcoholic than someone doing class As every day."

So, what will it take for users to call time on their love affair with cocaine? We could start by reforming the trivialised image of cocaine and rehab. "The ugly truth of addiction is hidden," says Dr Checinski. "Celebrities' lives are ruined by cocaine, and yours will be too." ☹

## IF YOU NEED HELP...

For free, confidential information at any time of the day or night, call Frank on 0800 77 66 00 or visit [Talktofrank.com](http://Talktofrank.com)

For information about Action on Addiction treatment centres, call 0845 126 4130 or see [Actiononaddiction.org.uk](http://Actiononaddiction.org.uk)

The Priory offers a free, anonymous assessment service. Call 0845 477 4679 or see [Prioryhealthcare.com](http://Prioryhealthcare.com)

## "Cocaine was my first love – my husband couldn't compete"

Samantha Nathan, 38, lost her marriage – and nearly her mind

"I don't want to do cocaine today," I thought. I was 21 and a trainee hairdresser, and I couldn't afford my weekend indulgence spilling over into the week. But I literally had no choice. I'd started finding any justification to do a line – it was raining, it was sunny, I was depressed, I was happy.

Ironically, it only made me work harder at my job to fund my habit. I became an art director for a big hairdressers and would jet all over the world

for catwalk shows with my stash in my Burberry bag.

By my late twenties, I was spending £100-£250 a day on cocaine. I'd wake up, make a cup of tea and do half a gram. My husband must have known, but he turned a blind eye. I started turning down invitations to nights out; I just wanted to stay in, snorting. Cocaine was my first love – my husband couldn't compete.

I was 32 when he found me at 9am clinging to the stair banister, whimpering, having wet

myself. I had been suffering from cocaine paranoia for months. The week before I'd written off a car. I heard voices in my head. My hair was falling out, I'd lost a stone and a half, and my gums and nose were receding. It was rehab or death. I went into the Perry Clayman Project to do their 12-step programme and have been clean ever since.

Despite rehab, my marriage failed. He'd put



up with so much already and I couldn't get better quickly enough to save it.

Without cocaine, I'd probably still be

happily married. These days I help other addicts and have resurrected my career. If you do the occasional line, please, please stop."

For more on the Perry Clayman Project, visit [Rehabtoday.com](http://Rehabtoday.com) or call 08000 380 480