



COCAINE

Cocaine is an illegal and highly addictive drug usually found in the form of a white powdery substance. The use, possession and trafficking of cocaine (or any attempt) is banned in sport and can carry serious consequences for athletes and their support staff under anti-doping, sport and criminal codes. Between 2018 and 2024, there have been 20 anti-doping matters involving cocaine use by Australian athletes.

COCAINE AND SPORT

Anti-Doping Rules

Under anti-doping rules the use or possession of cocaine is prohibited during the "In-Competition" period – this begins at 11:59pm the night before a competition and lasts until the end of competition and/or any athlete testing*. If an athlete is found to have used or possessed cocaine during this In-Competition period, they face a ban from all sport of up to 4 years.

Since cocaine can stay in someone's system for many days after it was initially consumed, it is possible that an athlete could test positive to cocaine on the day of their event, even if they did not use it during the In-Competition period.

If this occurs, the athlete will be given an immediate suspension from sport, and will be required to prove that they did not use the cocaine during the In-Competition period. This can involve getting legal representation, medical experts and witnesses. These cases can sometimes also go to a tribunal, and the athlete may be suspended until the process is complete.

If the athlete can prove they used the cocaine Out-of-Competition through this process, they may receive a ban of 1 or 3 months under WADA's "Substance of Abuse" rules. The amount of cocaine in an athlete's sample can be an indicator of when the cocaine was used, as well as other forms of evidence as part of an investigation.

It is important to note that athletes and their coaches, managers and support staff can also be found in breach of the anti-doping rules for Trafficking or Attempted Trafficking of cocaine. Importantly, these rules do not rely on testing, and apply at all times – not just during the In-Competition period. If an athlete or support person sells or provides cocaine to someone else, they face a ban of 4 years to life.

Sport Rules

Anti-doping testing only looks for cocaine in samples collected during the In-Competition period – anti-doping laboratories do not look for cocaine in Out-of-Competition samples.

However, in addition to anti-doping rules, some sports (like Rugby League and Rugby Union) also have rules in place about the use of cocaine outside of game days, which can include mid-week illicit substance testing. These testing programs, rules and consequences are determined by each sport, not by Sport Integrity Australia.

All sports in Australia are also required to have rules in place to recognise any criminal sanction regarding cocaine under their integrity policies. This means if someone is found guilty of a crime involving illegal drugs, the sport can take action against that person too.

Criminal Rules

The possession, trafficking or use of cocaine can also be a criminal matter and can lead to a criminal record, and jail time. Criminal convictions can also be used as evidence in anti-doping matters.



* This period may vary for some sports (for example, Equestrian) or for major events like the Olympics or Paralympics.



HEALTH RISKS OF COCAINE

Cocaine presents a risk to the physical, psychological and social health of users.

After taking cocaine, a user may take undue risks, feel anxious, agitated or panicked, ignore pain, and display unpredictable or violent behaviour. When coming down from cocaine, users may experience irritability, paranoia, mood swings, vomiting, insomnia and exhaustion.

Cocaine is addictive and can cause long term changes to the structure of the brain and the heart. People who use cocaine regularly may experience a decline in mental function, depression, anxiety, sexual performance, high blood pressure, irregular heart rate, psychosis and seizures. Long term cocaine users are also at higher risk of stroke, heart disease including an enlarged heart and kidney failure.

Users can also overdose on cocaine if they use too much, if a batch is too strong, or if a batch contains other substances. Cocaine is often cut with methamphetamines, opioids and even laundry detergent and laxatives - there is no way to know if another prohibited substance may be present in any given batch of cocaine.

COMBINING COCAINE AND EXERCISE

As a stimulant drug that increases blood pressure and heart rate, combining cocaine with exercise is incredibly dangerous. The elevated heart rate from cocaine use combined with the extra stress placed on the heart during exercise significantly increases the risk of stroke or heart attack while competing or working out, and can be fatal.

Cocaine may be viewed as performance enhancing by some athletes. Although cocaine can increase alertness and confidence for some people, the idea that it improves performance can be a dangerous perception which can lead to misuse and drug dependency. Cocaine can also have a serious negative impact on performance and mental functions if it is in an athlete's system during exercise. Cocaine use can cause heart enlargement which reduces your cardiac output and how long you can sustain high levels of exercise. Cocaine can also lead to poor decision making and increased risk taking, leading to poorer tactical and strategic performance. Regardless of performance impacts, the risk of heart attack while exercising on cocaine is serious and should not be ignored.

HOW LONG DOES COCAINE REMAIN IN MY SYSTEM?

There is no definitive timeframe in which cocaine, or its metabolites will become undetectable in an athlete's system. The effects and traces of cocaine will vary from person to person, depending on multiple factors such as the person's size, weight, diet, route of administration, frequency of use and activity levels. Drinking alcohol while taking cocaine can also increase the length of time it can be detected in your system. As an uncontrolled drug, the purity and strength of cocaine can vary greatly from one batch to another which can also change the timeframes. Athletes should not use past drug or anti-doping test results as a way to understand how long cocaine will be detected – especially as cocaine is not reported from Out-of-Competition anti-doping tests.

Want To Know More?

Sport Integrity Australia offers a free online course on Illicit Drugs in sport [available on our eLearning hub](#).

More information is also available on the [Sport Integrity Australia website](#) | [Cocaine Use In Sport](#).

If you are concerned about addiction or dependency in yourself or others, you can find resources on the [Department of Health website](#) | [Drug Help: How to Find Help](#).

Cocaine: 7 Key Points for Athletes



Using cocaine before or during exercise is incredibly dangerous and can lead to heart attack or stroke while working out. Cocaine naturally raises your heart rate which, when combined with the additional exertion of exercise, can be deadly. Cocaine can also cause irregular heart beat, known as cardiac arrhythmia.



Cocaine use can cause heart enlargement which reduces your cardiac output, how long you can sustain high levels of exercise, and therefore performance. Cocaine can also lead to poor decision making and increased risk taking, leading to poorer tactical and strategic performance.



If you possess or use cocaine during the In-Competition period*, you face a ban of up to 4 years. If you sell or give cocaine to anyone else (or attempt to), you face a ban of 4 years to life. This trafficking rule applies at all times (even at bars, nightclubs, or during the week) and also applies to support personnel like coaches, managers and team medical staff.



If you use cocaine during the Out-of-Competition period, it can still be in your sample on the day of competition. If this happens, you will be given an immediate suspension from sport, and will need to prove when you used the cocaine. This may require getting lawyers, scientific experts, and witnesses at your own cost. If you can prove you used cocaine outside of competition, you may receive a ban of 1 or 3 months.



There is no clear timeframe for how long cocaine will stay in your system. It varies based on the amount used, your metabolism, weight, diet etc. Drinking alcohol while using cocaine can make it stay present in your system for longer. Athletes should not use past drug or anti-doping test results as a way to understand how long cocaine will be detected as it will change each time.



Criminal convictions regarding cocaine are a breach of every sport's integrity policies and can lead to a ban from sport. Criminal convictions can also be used as evidence in anti-doping matters.



Your sport may also conduct Out-of-Competition illicit drug testing. This is different to anti-doping testing, and the rules are determined by your sport.



For More Information

Visit our website sportintegrity.gov.au, contact us at education@sportintegrity.gov.au, phone our Safe Sport Hotline 1800 161 361, or enquire 1300 027 232

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