

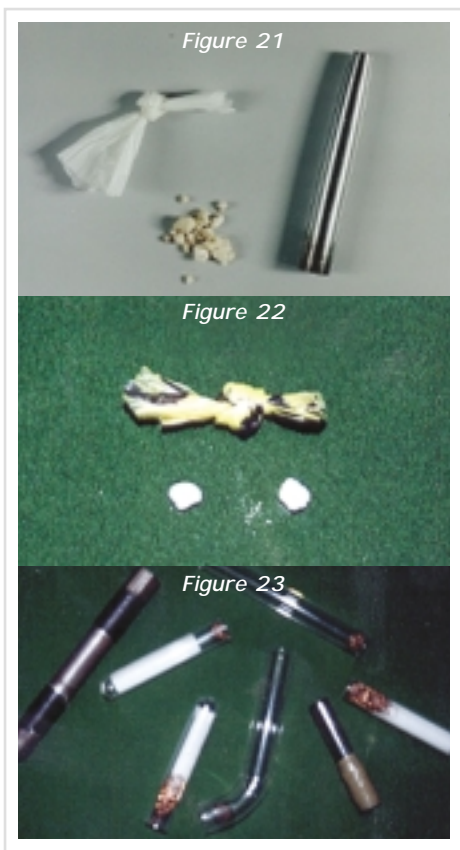


Cocaine usually appears as a white powder (Figure 20), which is synthesised from the leaves of the coca bush, a plant indigenous to South America. The drug is chemically related to the Novocain the dentist uses to numb your mouth, and cocaine has a similar effect when rubbed into the mucous membranes. You might have seen detectives do this on TV, but don't try it – the drug can be absorbed through the gums and you might test positive for cocaine use. If it comes into contact with your mouth, you may notice a bitter, medicinal taste.

Powder cocaine is commonly transported into this country using human couriers, some of whom carry the drug internally, using condoms or other latex wrappings that are swallowed or inserted into the body. Large quantities of cocaine are sometimes found still wrapped in these condom 'bullets'. Since cocaine is a powder, it can be used to fill any hollow item, and can even be dissolved in fluids.

Crack (rocks) is cocaine base, which can be smoked. It is made by combining baking soda (bicarb) with cocaine and water and 'cooking' it. This is often done in a spice bottle or a mayonnaise jar, resulting in crescent-shaped 'half moons'. These are broken into smaller 'rocks', slightly larger than a match-head, which are most commonly sold on the streets. These are white to yellow in colour, and look like a broken piece of tooth enamel or shiny soap (Figure 21). They are often wrapped in small pieces of plastic (such as pieces of grocery bags) and can be kept concealed in the mouth, ready to be swallowed if the police approach (Figure 22).

The smoking of crack does produce a subtle odour, but one that is difficult to recognise unless one has a lot of experience around the drug.



The paraphernalia for smoking crack are easily recognisable. Most often, crack is smoked through a glass or metal pipe into which a bit of metal gauze has been inserted near the tip. The crack is melted against this gauze with a lighter and the vapourised drug inhaled through the other end. Any part of this device may contain sufficient residue for a conviction (appearing as a brownish goo), and possession of a crack pipe can provide cause for a blood test for drugs (Figure 23).

Other paraphernalia associated with cocaine use include mirrors, straws, and rolled currency (for powder cocaine) and objects for scraping residue from the inside of crack pipes for re-use.