

## Cocaine Health Hazards

Cocaine use increases the risk of sudden heart attack and may also trigger stroke, even in users who otherwise are not at high risk for these sometimes fatal cardiovascular events. The risk is related to narrowing of blood vessels and increases in blood pressure and heart rate. Recently, NIDA-supported researchers at the Alcohol and Drug Abuse Research Center at McLean Hospital in Belmont, Massachusetts, have identified changes in blood components that may also play a role in cocaine-related heart attack and stroke.

Dr. Arthur Siegel and his colleagues studied the effect of cocaine on blood factors that respond to inflammation by promoting clotting to initiate repair. They found that a component that promotes clotting--von Willebrand factor (vWF)--increases and remains elevated for hours after a single exposure to cocaine. They also found that, compared with less frequent users, heavy users of cocaine have elevated levels of vWF, fibrinogen (a clotting factor), and C-reactive protein (CRP), a blood protein that increases in concentration in response to inflammation and is a reliable indicator of risk for heart attack.

"These findings suggest that cocaine creates a temporary risk for heart attack or stroke by increasing clotting factors," Dr. Siegel explains. "Elevated CRP levels could indicate that long-term use of the drug is triggering inflammation in the cardiovascular system."

For more information about cocaine addiction and treatment:

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