



A Newsweek model demonstrates the sniffing of cocaine.

Cocaine—this year's 'in' drug

by Elisabeth Coleman and Paul Brinkley-Rogers
Newsweek Feature Service

Heroin's a death trap, speed's a bummer, LSD is for crazies, pot for children. So what are the "conservatives" on the drug scene to do with their idle hours these days?

Lately, many of them have turned to old reliable, nonaddictive—and only occasionally lethal—cocaine.

The technique for using this year's "in" drug is almost as exotic as the kick that follows, and as varied as the practitioners:

A university student crams the white powder onto the long, carefully manicured nail of his pinkie.

A ghetto pimp places the powder on a crisp \$50 bill, then rolls the bill into the shape of a drinking straw.

A television actress puts the powder into a tiny antique silver spoon.

ALL THREE RAISE the stuff to one nostril, close the other and sniff deeply. What follows are 15 or 20 minutes of very pleasurable exhilaration and then several hours of nervousness and depression similar to, but not as bad as, the after-effects of an amphetamine jag.

What also can follow are extreme irritability, loss of the sense of heat and cold, tightening of muscles, jerking or convulsions and finally respiratory arrest and cardiovascular collapse.

The last two symptoms of course, are those of a fatal overdose—relatively rare up to now

but increasingly likely because of the unknown quantity of adulterants in most of the stuff presently available.

"One of the biggest dangers with cocaine," cautions bearded, long-haired Dr. George Gay of San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury Free Clinic, "is the narrow margin of safety between the dose that will get you off and the dose that will kill you."

STILL COCAINE HAS its advantages over some drugs. It imparts no physical craving for repeat doses (though it may become psychologically addicting), it does not have to be injected and some of its fans find it to be sexually stimulating. Most importantly, it doesn't disable the user from normal living as heroin does.

"Coke doesn't burn out your brain the way speed and LSD do," says one user. "It's a power kick," says another. "I get the feeling I'm completely in control of the situation—any situation."

"The first time I took cocaine, I heard bells ringing in my brain—clear and pretty like Christmas and Santa Claus," says a 46-year-old user. "They say that only happens the first time you take coke and I guess it's true. All these years I've kept listening for those bells but I've never heard them again."

Cocaine has always been an aristocrat among drugs. Top people from all walks of life have used it. Sigmund Freud had a bout with the drug; so did Arthur Conan Doyle, and he liked it so well he hooked Sherlock Holmes with it. Dutch Schultz snorted the stuff in the '30s

before his more ambitious bank heists—and, thus, gave the expression "Dutch courage" a new vogue.

NOWADAYS IT IS the "with it" drug in Hollywood and the music industry. In some ghetto circles, coke is a status symbol. The wealthiest pimps and drug dealers are on cocaine and look down on the heroin-users as their financial inferiors. A heavy coke man can spend more than \$100 a day on his drug; heroin addicts can usually get by for \$20 to \$40 a day.

Most of the cocaine that comes into the U.S. is derived from the leaves of the erythroxylon coca tree which grows mostly in Columbia and the Peruvian Andes. The drug moves northward, through Mexico, is smuggled over the border and—increasing in value all the time—finally ends up in major cities all around the country. U.S. customs seized \$49.2 million worth of cocaine last year—nearly three times more than in the previous year.

Though many people seem able to use cocaine moderately, a growing number of heavy users are turning up. They can sometimes be identified by chronically running noses. Frequent sniffing strips away delicate nasal membranes, and doctors have found patients in whom the cartilage separating both sides of the nasal opening has rotted out after a few months on the drug.

ADDITIONAL DANGERS arise when cocaine is cut by dealers with boric acid, various anesthetics, amphetamines, quinine and, most recently, arsenic. The additives are not only dangerous in themselves, but leave the user in the position of not knowing his own capacity for cocaine. If by chance he has begun with heavily cut mixtures, and then unknowingly comes upon pure cocaine, the chances of an overdose are vastly increased.

As Dave Van Ronk laments in his classic song, "Cocaine Blues":
"Cocaine's for horses,
Not for men.
They tell me it'll kill me,
But they won't say when. . . ."

Interim . . .

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Mexico, Costa Rica and El Salvador to study Marketing in these countries, and an English class will tour New Mexico and Arizona on a study of native American literature of the Southwest.

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