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Cocaine Use Can Really Blow Your Nose

New York, NY January 8, 2003 – Aah, Miami Beach, land of palm trees, sun, surf and late night star studded parties. Often, what goes on in Miami once the sun sets is anything but healthy. **Dr. Julio Gallo is a Miami Beach board certified facial plastic surgeon.** Among the usual plastic surgery requests, Dr. Gallo is often called upon to fix the noses of his fast track patient population that have been destroyed due to years of repeated cocaine use. Not only is use of this substance extremely dangerous, it can literally compromise the function and appearance of one's nose.

The Office of National Drug Control Policy estimates the number of chronic cocaine users at 3.6 million. As most people know, Cocaine in its powder form is snorted into the nostrils. Although it is rapidly absorbed into the blood stream the drug also causes the vessels in the lining of the nasal passages to shrink. Shortly after use, the blood vessels widen again resulting in a red stuffed up nose which is usually a tell-tale sign of Cocaine use even for the lay person. Repeat Cocaine use leads to the loss of blood supply to the septum which then becomes damaged, leaving a gaping hole between the two nasal passages. In more severe cases, the bridge of the nose may even collapse. Regularly snorting cocaine, for example, can lead to loss of sense of smell, nosebleeds, problems with swallowing, hoarseness, and an overall irritation of the nasal septum, which can lead to a chronically inflamed, runny nose.

As Dr. Gallo explains, "When cocaine is snorted, the blood vessels become very constricted, therefore, in order to compensate the nose must steal blood from the lining in the mucosa (lining) in the septum. Over time, with daily use of Cocaine, so much blood has been taken from the mucosa that it causes the septum to disintegrate resulting in nasal collapse or septal perforations. In addition, the nose can also become crusty and mucus filled." When the septum does collapse it is called a *Saddle Nose Deformity* because as the name implies, it looks like a horse saddle in the middle of the nose. This can lead to necrosis, which is death of tissue in the nose resulting in permanent scarring.

In his practice Dr. Gallo is often called upon to repair the ravages of Cocaine to the nose. He will do so only once a patient is 'clean' and has been tested prior to surgery. He is adamant about this because if patients resume use after surgery they are more susceptible to infections and nasal collapse. Some of the technologically advanced methods Dr. Gallo uses to repair a "Cocaine Nose" include:

- **Using ear cartilage to augment damaged tissue in the nose**
- **Synthetic materials such as Gortex to build up the bridge of the nose**
- **Cartilage from a cadaver**
- **Patient's own cartilage from a rib or hip**
- **Filling in nasal perforations with patient's own tissue if the damage is not expansive**

Of course, aside from damage to the nose, there are enormous medical complications associated with cocaine use. Some of the most frequent complications are cardiovascular effects, including disturbances in heart rhythm and heart attacks; such respiratory effects as chest pain and respiratory failure; neurological effects, including strokes, seizure, and headaches; and gastrointestinal complications, including abdominal pain and nausea. For a certain group of the Miami party scene, the motto seems to be, “live fast, die young, and leave a beautiful corpse.” If the health aspect does not scare these partiers sober, perhaps their vanity will.

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