

only in Woman's Day



Andre'a took up drugs in midlife, and they nearly killed her.

'I started selling off my rental properties... then my sports cars'

How I beat my ice addiction and got my family back!



The mum-of-two now runs a charity aimed at getting people off ice.

Aussie mum Andre'a Simmons had never even tried drugs – then she got hooked on ice

When you first meet polished mother-of-two Andre'a Simmons, you'd never guess she was once an ice addict. She'd never done drugs before, but Andre'a first tried ice at the age of 40 – having been told it was just a harmless bit of fun. Soon her life was spiralling out of control as addiction took hold. Her weight dropped to 40kg, she became estranged from her daughters and she racked up a staggering \$75,000 in debt.

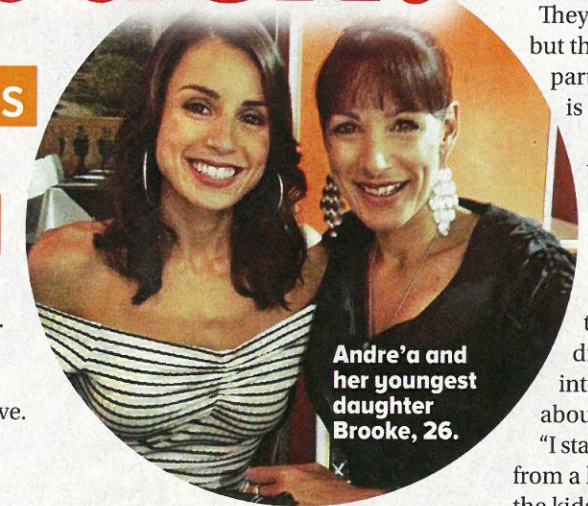
"If I can fall into ice addiction, anyone can," says Andre'a, now 47. "The drug freezes your brain so you have no logic, no sense of consequence. You just chase that first happy high at any cost." Successful businesswoman Andre'a had a string of rental properties, lived in a five-bedroom home set on a hectare on the Gold Coast, drove luxury cars and holidayed every six months at some of the world's most glamorous resorts.

CHASING LOVE
Then she reunited with an old flame. Within six months, she moved to Melbourne to be with him. "It sounds silly now, but my girls had finished school and were old enough to look after themselves, so I finally felt I had no responsibility. I wanted to chase love. I'd never tried drugs before,

but my boyfriend said I should let my hair down. "I guess I just thought it was similar to pot and wouldn't be very addictive. I trusted him."

LIFE UNRAVELS
But Andre'a was hooked from the very first time – it made her feel invincible. Within a week she was eagerly taking the drug again, and soon she was having binges lasting five days, followed by a few days of sleeping off the effects. "Within four months, I started selling off my rental properties to support my addiction. Then it was my sports cars. I was spending \$500 a day and was too wired to get a job," says Andre'a. Her once loving relationship with her daughters became strained. She refused to see them for fear they'd realise how bad things had become.

Then, one day after mixing ice with a drug called 'G', or fantasy, Andre'a collapsed and stopped breathing. When she recovered, she knew things had to change. "I kept coming to, and my boyfriend was shaking me on the floor tiles, screaming for me to breathe. I really thought I was going to die. But even then, when I finally came to, I took a hit of ice to calm me down from the shock." Fearing she couldn't conquer ice alone, Andre'a turned to her



Andre'a and her youngest daughter Brooke, 26.

She spent months at her mum's house, lying in bed crying and suffering exhaustion, depression and withdrawal symptoms. "Eventually, I felt stronger and could trust myself a little more. I felt a surge rise inside me – I wanted to prevent others from going through what I had," she says. Three weeks after her recovery, Andre'a got the courage to speak to her daughters. "I had to tell them what had been going on. They were hurt and confused but they've been a really strong part of my recovery. Family is so important to that."

It's been more than four years since Andre'a got clean. In 2014, she set up the Australian Anti Ice Campaign. Her daughter runs family support for their clinical services division and Andre'a goes into schools to warn children about the dangers of drugs. "I start by holding up a chemical from a hardware store and asking the kids if any of them want to drink it," she says. "Of course they say no, but many of them are amazed when I tell them it's one of the toxic ingredients of ice." Andre'a doesn't want any other family to go through what hers did. "[With ice] families think their loved one is as good as dead, but there is hope for all and we can help."

If you're concerned about the ice epidemic, join the AAIC Army in the fight against the drug at australianantiicecampaign.org.au.



Lauryn will appear in court over her charge.



Vince was put on a good behaviour bond.

Aussie stars on ice charges

Ice-related allegations have been made against high-profile Aussies, including boxing champ Lauryn Eagle, who was charged with driving under the influence of drugs after allegedly testing positive to meth at a random breath test. And actor Vince Colosimo has had a very public battle with the drug since being found in possession of ice in September last year.

Words: Lisa Hammer. Pictures: Phillip Castleton/bauerbyrdication.com.au. Hair & makeup: Deanne Dorflay