

# Ketamine

## What is ketamine?

Ketamine is used by medical practitioners and veterinarians as an anaesthetic. It is sometimes used illegally by people to get 'high'.

Ketamine can produce hallucinogenic effects, causing a person to see, hear, smell, feel or taste things that aren't really there or are different from how they are in reality.

When it's sold illegally, ketamine usually comes as a white crystalline powder. It can also be made into tablets and pills, or dissolved in a liquid.

A number of clinical trials and studies are currently being undertaken to assess ketamine as a treatment for depression, early indications are showing good results.

### Other names

Special K, K, ket, kitkat, super k or horse trunk.

### How is it used?

Ketamine can be swallowed, snorted or injected. It is also sometimes smoked with cannabis or tobacco. The effects of ketamine may be experienced within 30 seconds if injected, 5–10 minutes if snorted, and up to 20 minutes if swallowed. The effects of ketamine can last for approximately 45 to 90 minutes.

## Effects of ketamine

**There is no safe level of drug use.** Use of any drug always carries some risk. It's important to be careful when taking any type of drug.

Ketamine affects everyone differently, based on:

- Size, weight and health
- Whether the person is used to taking it
- Whether other drugs are taken around the same time
- The amount taken
- The strength of the drug (varies from batch to batch)

The following effects may be experienced:

- Feeling happy and relaxed

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- Feeling detached from your body ('falling into a k-hole')
- Hallucinations
- Confusion and clumsiness
- Increased heart rate and blood pressure
- Slurred speech and blurred vision
- Anxiety, panic and violence
- Vomiting
- Lowered sensitivity to pain

## Overdose

If a large amount or a strong batch is taken, it could also cause an overdose. If any of the following effects are experienced an ambulance should be called straight away by dialling triple zero (000). Ambulance officers don't need to involve the police.

- Inability to move, rigid muscles
- High body temperature, fast heartbeat
- Convulsions
- Coma and 'near death' experiences
- Death

## Coming down

In the day following ketamine use, the following effects may be experienced:

- Memory loss
- Impaired judgement, disorientation
- Clumsiness
- Aches and pains
- Depression

## Long-term effects

Regular use of ketamine may eventually cause:

- Headaches
- Flashbacks
- Poor sense of smell (from snorting)
- Mood and personality changes, depression
- Poor memory, thinking and concentration
- Ketamine bladder syndrome (see below)
- Abdominal pain
- Needing to use more to get the same effect

If a large amount or a strong batch is taken, it could cause an overdose.

- Dependence on ketamine
- Financial, work and social problems

## Ketamine bladder syndrome

Large, repeated doses of ketamine may eventually cause 'ketamine bladder syndrome', a painful condition needing ongoing treatment. Symptoms include difficulty holding in urine, and incontinence, which can cause ulceration in the bladder. Anyone suffering from ketamine bladder syndrome needs to stop using ketamine and see a health professional.

## Using ketamine with other drugs

The effects of taking ketamine with other drugs– including over-the-counter or prescribed medications – can be unpredictable and dangerous, and could cause:

- **Ketamine + alcohol or opiates:** lack of awareness of effects of the depressant drugs, which may lead to taking too much and vomiting, slowed breathing, coma and death.
- **Ketamine + amphetamines, ecstasy and cocaine:** enormous strain on the body, which can lead to fast heart rate.

## Withdrawal

Giving up ketamine after using it for a long time is challenging because the body has to get used to functioning without it. Withdrawal symptoms usually last for 4-6 days. These symptoms can include:

- Cravings for ketamine
- No appetite
- Tiredness
- Chills, sweating
- Restlessness, tremors
- Nightmares, anxiety, depression
- Irregular and rapid heartbeat

## Further Information

The Druginfo website has information on:

- Treatment
- Help and support
- References for this fact sheet

**Go to [druginfo.adf.org.au](http://druginfo.adf.org.au)**

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