

Ketamine

Information sheet



Ketamine is a dissociative drug with painkilling effects. Availability of ketamine and its use have both increased in recent years in the UK, particularly among young people.

Ketamine, often known as ket or K, is usually found as a white crystalline powder or liquid. It is typically snorted but may also be swallowed or injected. It is a class B drug.

Effects

The effects of ketamine are usually felt within minutes and can last for a few hours.

Ketamine makes people feel detached from themselves and their surroundings. Some people report feeling euphoric, relaxed or floaty.

High doses of ketamine bring on an intense disconnection from reality, sometimes known as a 'K-hole'. People may not be able to move or respond in a normal way.

Reasons for use

People take ketamine for different reasons, including to feel detached, enhance club or party experiences, or to self-medicate.

While ketamine may be used under specialist medical supervision to treat some mental health conditions, using it without medical supervision can lead to dependence and other harms.

Ketamine may be seen as less harmful than drugs such as heroin or cocaine but it still carries significant health risks.

Health impacts

Adverse effects can occur even at low doses.



Short-term effects include:

- anxiety
- chest pain
- memory loss
- hallucinations
- temporary paralysis

Ketamine can impair awareness, judgement and coordination, which may make someone more vulnerable to injury or being targeted for assault, including sexual assault.

Longer-term effects include:

- nasal damage (if snorted)
- weight loss
- low mood and anxiety
- difficulty thinking and concentrating
- damage to kidneys and liver

Ketamine affects the bladder and can cause symptoms such as:

- severe abdominal pain (K-cramps)
- frequent urination
- incontinence
- blood in urine

People may not realise these symptoms are related to ketamine use. For example, they may have had repeated treatment for urinary tract infections.

Mixing with other drugs

Ketamine is frequently taken with other drugs or may be unknowingly mixed with other drugs. This can increase the likelihood of harmful effects, unexpected reactions and overdose.

Mixing ketamine with depressants, like alcohol, increases the risk of sedation and unconsciousness. Mixing with stimulants, like cocaine, increases the risk of chest pain, high blood pressure and seizures.

Overdose

People may take several doses, either to maintain the effect or because they may not remember how much they have taken. This increases the likelihood of overdose.

Overdose signs might include:

- being unresponsive (will not wake when shaken)
- snoring or slow breathing
- seizures or fits

Tolerance and withdrawal

Frequent ketamine use can lead to a rapid increase in tolerance. This means more ketamine is needed to feel the same effects.

Prolonged use of ketamine may cause withdrawal symptoms, such as fatigue, anxiety, difficulty sleeping and cravings.

Action for professionals

Compassionate and non-judgemental conversations can help people to understand the risks, recognise symptoms and access services. Support, including online and peer support, can help people reduce or stop ketamine use, lowering the risk of long-term health damage.

If concerned about someone, encourage them to seek help early.



- Access appropriate harm reduction advice: crew.scot/ketamine
 - Speak to a GP about any physical or mental health symptoms.
 - Contact a drug service for harm reduction, support or recovery pathways.
- To find a local service, visit: drugandalcohol.services.scot



publichealthscotland.scot/RADAR