

Facts about Ketamine

Special k, vitamin k, K, kit kat, jet, ket

Ketamine (K) is mainly used as an anaesthetic by the medical profession and veterinarians though it is also used as a sedative and pain killer. In recent years it has been used as a date-rape drug.

Ketamine can come as a white crystalline powder, a clear liquid, or tablet. It can be taken orally, snorted or injected (which is not recommended). It is sometimes mixed with stimulants and sold as ecstasy though ketamine has no E content and is not a loved-up buzz. It's more like PCP (or Angel Dust). The effects of K can be unpredictable. Most users say it is a really 'out there' experience, even more so than acid and while some find it a mind-expanding even spiritual experience others dislike the feeling of having no control.

The effects depend on how much you take and how you take it. At low doses Ketamine produces a feeling like being drunk. Increasing doses cause a trance-like trippy state where the user feels disconnected from their body and at large doses people can become completely disconnected from both mind and body and the feelings of sedation and numbness are more pronounced than its hallucinogenic effects. It is very short-acting, taking effect within about 10 - 15 minutes and wearing off after 1 - 2 hours.

In New Zealand Ketamine is scheduled as a Class C drug with penalties for possession, importing, manufacturing and/or supplying including jail and/or fines.

Harms associated with Ketamine

- It's easy to hurt yourself on K because you don't feel pain properly. People have experienced significant harm after jumping from heights, driving and causing traffic accidents, been victims of crime, have drowned, and have suffered hypothermia
- Ketamine can put you in a dream-like and detached state, make you sleepy, uncoordinated, and nauseous, making it unsafe to drive, operate heavy machinery or do tasks requiring movement
- Even everyday activities can be challenging if you go into a 'k-hole' – it feels like your mind and body have separated and you cannot move or speak. This makes it particularly risky if you start vomiting as being unable to move significantly increases the risk of choking
- It can also cause hallucinations or make you feel agitated or detached from yourself and reality making it very difficult to interact with others
- Intravenous use of K into is very risky as you can be unconscious before you remove the needle from your vein
- Combining with other depressant drugs (e.g. benzos, opiates, alcohol) slows down bodily functions so increases the risk of overdose, choking, or losing consciousness
- Combining with speed or other stimulants puts extra strain on your body and increases the risk of psychotic reactions similar to PCP/ angel dust
- There is not a lot of information about ketamine in pregnancy but using while pregnant could put you and the baby at short – and long-term risk
- Using ketamine can lead to LSD-type flashbacks, short- and long-term memory loss, depression, mood swings, and ongoing trouble with concentration and thinking clearly
- Long term use can also cause physical problems including bladder inflammation and trouble peeing, with pressure and pain behind the pelvic bone that can be irreversible even after stopping ketamine use. A back-up of urine in the bladder can cause kidney problems and in severe cases lead to kidney failure. People also report problems with the gastric system (vomiting and reflux), seizures, high blood pressure and respiratory issues

Reducing the harms associated with Ketamine use

- No use is safest but if you are going to use, go low and slow. Low doses are safer
- Never use around babies and children. If using make arrangements for children to be cared for by someone who is not using
- Know what you are using. Check the potency with someone who has tried the same gear. Use reagent tests or head to a drug checking clinic. <https://knowyourstuff.nz/>
- Avoid combining K with other alcohol and other drugs
- Avoid K if you have heart or breathing problems, have experienced mental distress or are feeling fragile or have previously freaked out on acid (LSD) or other hallucinogens
- If you are going to inject do it intramuscularly, **not** intravenously and of course, never share equipment
- Don't share straws or other snorting devices as these may have traces of blood on them and put you at risk of contracting a blood borne virus like HIV or hepatitis (B and C)
- Chill out in the chill room (if you can find one). Or stay home
- Watch out for each other and don't use K alone - tell friends if you're taking it
- Avoid eating to reduce the chance of choking and vomiting when out of it
- Do not attempt to drive a vehicle or operate machinery!
- If you are breast feeding and use K (not recommended) don't breastfeed the baby for around 12 hours after and discard any milk expressed during this time.

Tolerance and dependence

A person who uses ketamine regularly or in very high doses may develop a tolerance which means they need to increase the amount they are using to achieve the desired effects. If using ketamine is central to someone's thoughts, activities and emotions they can be described as psychologically dependent.

Many users think that hallucinogenic drugs do not have withdrawal symptoms, but people who have tried to cut down or stop using ketamine report experiencing loss of appetite, anxiety, sweating or feeling very hot or very cold, having nightmares and mild vision problems, headaches and craving to use. These are the signs of a physical dependence. Generally, withdrawal lasts for about 4 to 6 days but the experience of withdrawing from ketamine is different for everyone.

What the drug does

Commonly experienced effects include:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• feeling very 'out there' and disconnected from the body leading to lack of coordination, sweating and slurred speech | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• hallucinations and altered visual, auditory, bodily, time and space perception |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• numbness, insensitive to pain• euphoria and relaxation | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• distorted body image (changing size and form) and 'tunnel vision' |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• short term memory loss: unable to access old memories or create new ones, forgetting words, names, and conversations | |

High doses can cause more intense and unpleasant or dangerous effects including:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• confusion, feelings of anxiety, panic and terror, paranoia | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• nausea, vomiting, convulsions, twitching |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• drowsiness leading to heavy sedation or loss of consciousness | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• unpredictable, hostile and bizarre behaviour |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• incontinence, little bladder control | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• blurred/double vision, tics/ involuntary eye movement |

The signs that something isn't right:

Chest pain, hallucinations that don't go away, a very slow heartbeat, trouble breathing, long-lasting or very distressing paralysis, unconsciousness, psychosis or seizures. You or the people around you should act quickly.

Call 111 and stay with the person until help arrives.