

# 15. Ketamine

(2021 version)

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# Ketamine

## Introduction

Ketamine is a short-acting but powerful dissociative anaesthetic, which has been used when operating on humans and animals. It belongs to the same family as phencyclidine (PCP) and became popular in 1992 in the club and rave scene in the UK when people were led to believe they were buying ecstasy.



## How it is taken

Ketamine comes in ampoules for injecting, white tablets and coloured capsules for swallowing, powder for sniffing, and it can also be smoked. Usually the drug appears as a white scored tablet on the streets. It is thought to be illicitly produced from powder diverted from lawful supplies but it is also known for legitimately produced ketamine to be stolen and used illegally. The drug is often mistaken for other drugs and may even be sold as another drug. On the other hand a drug bought as ketamine might turn out to be another, possibly even more dangerous, substance.

Some of the street names for ketamine are:

- K
- Ketamine k
- Special K
- Vitamin K
- Kit Kat
- Green

## Health

### Short-term effects

Ketamine is a complicated drug that is basically a hallucinogen with painkilling properties, but also some mild stimulant and depressant effects! If injected, the effects can last for about one hour. If it is taken orally, effects can last up to three hours. Effects include;

- An initial 'rush' accompanied by nausea, slurring of speech and vision
- Numbness - as ketamine is an anaesthetic, it makes the user unable to feel pain and there is a danger of hurting oneself without noticing it
- When taken in a higher dose the user develops altered perception which leads to experiences with hallucinations which feel even more real than with LSD
- Synaesthesia

- Powerful out-of-body experiences called the K-hole (people feel as though they are flying or floating)
- Feeling sick and vomiting (higher dose)
- Feeling relaxed and high
- Risk of overdose
- Increased risks if used with alcohol
- Lack of co-ordination

The effects of ketamine use are unpredictable, and the user gets out of control. In smaller doses, ketamine can lead to 'depersonalisation' where the person feels detached from their own body, not caring about or being aware of what is happening around them. The user can be in a daze and have an accident or get lost and stay out all night, resulting in hypothermia.

People who use ketamine sometimes do what is known as 'the ketamine two-step', where they take two steps forward and one step back. They can also behave as if they are drunk.

In higher doses, users can experience the 'k-hole' with effects similar to schizophrenia.

### Long-term effects

- Blurring of vision
- Risk of flashbacks
- Loss of concentration
- Memory loss
- Psychosis
- Loss of appetite
- Weight-loss

### Dependence

Ketamine does not cause physical dependence, but a user can develop psychological dependence.

### Tolerance

A user will need to increase the dose of ketamine fairly quickly in order to get the same effects they have had previously.

## The Law

Since June 2014, Ketamine is a Class B drug under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971.

# **Ketamine Statistics**

Last updated December 2020

## Use of Ketamine

0.8% of adults aged 16-59 reported having used ketamine in the last year and 3.2% of young adults (16-24) reported having used it.

In 2009/10, 0.5% of 16-59-year-olds said they had used ketamine in the last year and 1.7% of 16-24-year-olds reported using it in the last year.

This is the highest estimate of reported use of ketamine recorded by the Crime Survey.

(Crime Survey for England and Wales, 2019/20; British Crime Survey 2009/10)