



Drugs of Abuse: KETAMINE

What is Ketamine?

Ketamine is a dissociative anesthetic that has some hallucinogenic effects. It distorts perceptions of sight and sound and makes the user feel disconnected and not in control. It is an injectable, short-acting anesthetic for use in humans and animals. It is referred to as a “dissociative anesthetic” because it makes patients feel detached from their pain and environment.



Ketamine can induce a state of sedation (feeling calm and relaxed), immobility, relief from pain, and amnesia (no memory of events while under the influence of the drug). It is abused for its ability to produce dissociative sensations and hallucinations. Ketamine has also been used to facilitate sexual assault.

What is its origin?

Ketamine is produced commercially in a number of countries, including the United States. Most of the ketamine illegally distributed in the United States is diverted or stolen from legitimate sources, particularly veterinary clinics, or smuggled into the United States from Mexico.

Distribution of ketamine typically occurs among friends and acquaintances, most often at raves, nightclubs, and at private parties; street sales of ketamine are rare.

What are common street names?

Common street names include:

Cat Tranquilizer, Cat Valium, Jet K, Kit Kat, Purple, Special K, Special La Coke, Super Acid, Super K, and Vitamin K

What does it look like?

Ketamine comes in a clear liquid and a white or off-white powder. Powdered ketamine (100 milligrams to 200 milligrams) typically is packaged in small glass vials, small plastic bags, and capsules as well as paper, glassine, or aluminum foil folds.

How is it abused?

Ketamine, along with the other “club drugs,” has become popular among teens and young adults at dance clubs and “raves.” Ketamine is manufactured commercially as a powder or liquid. Powdered ketamine is also formed from pharmaceutical ketamine by evaporating the liquid using hot plates, warming trays, or microwave ovens, a process that results in the formation of crystals, which are then ground into powder.



Powdered ketamine is cut into lines known as bumps and snorted, or it is smoked, typically in marijuana or tobacco cigarettes. Liquid ketamine is injected or mixed into drinks. Ketamine is found by itself or often in combination with MDMA, amphetamine, methamphetamine, or cocaine.

What is its effect on the mind?

Ketamine produces hallucinations. It distorts perceptions of sight and sound and makes the user feel disconnected and not in control. A “Special K” trip is touted as better than that of LSD or PCP because its hallucinatory effects are relatively short in duration, lasting approximately 30 to 60 minutes as opposed to several hours.

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Slang for experiences related to Ketamine or effects of Ketamine include:

- “K-land” (refers to a mellow & colorful experience)
- “K-hole” (refers to the out-of-body, near death experience)
- “Baby food” (users sink in to blissful, infantile inertia)
- “God” (users are convinced that they have met their maker)

The onset of effects is rapid and often occurs within a few minutes of taking the drug, though taking it orally results in a slightly slower onset of effects. Flashbacks have been reported several weeks after ketamine is used. Ketamine may also cause agitation, depression, cognitive difficulties, unconsciousness, and amnesia.

What is its effect on the body?

A couple of minutes after taking the drug, the user may experience an increase in heart rate and blood pressure that gradually decreases over the next 10 to 20 minutes. Ketamine can make users unresponsive to stimuli. When in this state, users experience:

- involuntarily rapid eye movement
- dilated pupils
- salivation
- tear secretions
- stiffening of the muscles

This drug can also cause nausea.

What are its overdose effects?

An overdose can cause unconsciousness and dangerously slowed breathing.

Which drugs cause similar effects?

Other hallucinogenic drugs such as LSD, PCP, and mescaline can cause hallucinations. There are also several drugs such as GHB, Rohypnol and other depressants that are misused for their amnesiac or sedative properties to facilitate sexual assault.

What is its legal status in the United States?

Since the 1970s, ketamine has been marketed in the United States as an injectable, short-acting anesthetic for use in humans and animals. In 1999, ketamine including its salts, isomers, and salts of isomers, became a Schedule III non-narcotic substance under the Federal Controlled Substances Act. It has a currently acceptable medical use but some potential for abuse, which may lead to moderate or low physical dependence or high psychological dependence

U.S. Department of Justice, Drug Enforcement Administration, 2011

www.justice.gov/dea/pr/multimedia-library/publications/drug_of_abuse.pdf