

# KETAMINE: THE FACTS

## WHAT IS KETAMINE?

Ketamine hydrochloride is a depressant and acts on the central nervous system as an anaesthetic agent. It is used to make the body insensitive to surgical treatment. It may be used in combination with other medicines to induce anaesthesia. It works by stopping the brain from interpreting messages of pain.

Ketamine is also used for veterinary purposes.

Ongoing and heavy use of ketamine may lead to a dependence and tolerance to ketamine, however, addiction is unlikely to occur when ketamine hydrochloride is used as prescribed for anaesthesia.

**The non-medical use of ketamine is illegal.**

Street names include: Special K, K, Cat Tranquilizer, ket, Ketaset, Ketalar®, kitkat, super K, Vitamin K, Lady K.

## HOW IS IT USED ILLICITLY?

Ketamine can be in a clear liquid form or a white crystalline powder. It can be made into tablets and pills and is sometimes sold as 'ecstasy'. Ketamine is often swallowed, snorted, shafted (inserted anally) or injected intramuscularly. It is sometimes smoked with other substances such as cannabis or tobacco.

## DRINK SPIKING

Ketamine has been used in drink spiking due to its dis-inhibiting and amnesiac effects that can put a person at risk of sexual assault, rape or theft.

If you think your drink has been spiked:

- ask someone you trust to get you to a safe place
- ask your doctor to test for the presence of drugs which can be identified through urine or blood tests within 24 hours.

If you feel unwell or suspect that you have been sexually assaulted then call an ambulance or go to the nearest NSW Health Sexual Assault service or Emergency Department.

Drink spiking is serious and illegal. To prevent drink spiking, it may be best to watch your drink, avoid sharing drinks, buy/pour your own drink and don't accept drinks from people you don't know well or trust.

## MIXING WITH OTHER DRUGS

Combining ketamine with depressants such as alcohol, tranquillisers or GHB can slow down the body's central nervous system and is dangerous.

At higher doses ketamine depresses consciousness and breathing and overdose is a significant risk when combined with depressants.

## EFFECTS OF KETAMINE

The immediate effects of ketamine may be experienced within 30 seconds (if taken intravenously) to 20 minutes (if taken orally) and can last for one to three hours.

What ketamine does to you depends on whether you use ketamine on its own or with alcohol or other depressant drugs.

Physical effects may include:

- sweating
- impaired motor coordination
- blurred vision
- twitching eye movement
- constricted pupils
- slurred speech
- increased libido
- breathing rate increased but shallow
- increased heart rate and blood pressure
- nausea and vomiting
- reduced sensitivity to pain and numbness of the extremities
- drowsiness
- anaesthesia
- muscle rigidity
- hypersalivation
- increased body temperature or fever
- risk of accidents
- cardiac arrhythmia
- convulsions
- coma.

Psychological effects may include:

- euphoria and relaxation
- feelings of dissociation (being detached from the body)
- disorientation
- hallucinations and distorted sensory processing, including visual, auditory, bodily, time and space perception
- delusions
- dysphoria (feeling unwell or unhappy)
- disorganised thoughts, confusion and difficulty concentrating, thinking or maintaining attention
- anxiety, agitation, paranoia
- insomnia

- erratic, hostile bizarre behaviour
- feelings of panic and terror
- depression
- amnesia
- "near death" experience.

People who use ketamine may fall into an anaesthetised state, the 'k-hole'. The experience of being in a k-hole varies but generally involves dissociation, which may include feeling socially and physically detached or disconnected from everyone else, having hallucinations and experiencing a distorted sense of time and space.

One of the more serious effects of using ketamine is that a user may unknowingly harm themselves. There is the potential for people to cut or burn themselves while using the drug. It may impair your capacity as a parent/primary carer of children.

## LONG TERM EFFECTS

Some regular users experience flashbacks – the spontaneous recurrence of an experience that occurred while the user was under the influence of the drug. Flashbacks can occur days, weeks or months after a person has used ketamine.

There is also some emerging evidence that repeated use may impair some aspects of memory and cognitive functions.

Long-term, frequent use of ketamine has been linked to personality and mood changes including paranoia and egocentrism, reduced ability to concentrate and depression.

Regular ketamine use is associated with severe bladder and kidney problems. These include problems with frequent urination, problems passing urine, bladder ulcers and kidney problems including renal failure. Prolonged heavy use can result in 'ketamine bladder' and swelling of the kidney due to urine flow obstruction. Some users have reported 'k-belly' or 'k cramps' (abdominal pain).

## TOLERANCE AND DEPENDENCE

Tolerance to ketamine can develop very quickly, with people needing more and more to achieve the same euphoric and psychedelic effects.

People who regularly use ketamine can develop a physical and psychological dependence and may find it difficult to stop.

## KETAMINE RELATED EMERGENCY

If you can't wake someone up or you are concerned that they may have sustained a head injury from a drug related fall – call an ambulance immediately – dial **Triple Zero (000)**.

If the person has been mixing ketamine with other drugs or nitrites, tell the NSW Ambulance paramedic exactly what they have taken. Paramedics are there to help. Generally paramedics don't involve the police **unless** there is danger to themselves or other people/children, someone dies, or a crime (such as violence or theft) has been committed.

## THE LAW

Using ketamine, or keeping, selling or giving it to someone else is illegal. If you are caught you could face substantial fines and penalties including a prison sentence. There have been instances where ketamine has been used in drink spiking due to its dis-inhibiting and amnesiac effects.

## WITHDRAWAL

There is limited evidence to support the view that people who are dependent on ketamine experience physical withdrawal symptoms if they suddenly stop taking it. However, previous users who report stopping use of ketamine after long term regular use may experience cravings, shaking, anxiety and sweats.

If you are experiencing problems with withdrawal, contact your doctor or health centre.

## PREGNANCY AND BREASTFEEDING

Most drugs have some effect on the unborn baby if the mother uses them and it is not recommended that people use ketamine while pregnant or breastfeeding. Inform antenatal staff of ketamine use and attend regular antenatal checkups.

If a mother uses ketamine while breastfeeding, it is possible that the drug will be present in her milk and have adverse effects on the baby.

It is generally risky to take any drug while breastfeeding without medical advice.

## DRIVING UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF KETAMINE

It is illegal to drive under the influence of drugs including ketamine. Drowsiness, impaired mental alertness and coordination, and hallucinations can affect the ability to drive.

Anyone under the influence of ketamine who kills or injures another person while driving can be sentenced to a term in prison.

## SELF-HELP ASSOCIATIONS

[na.org.au](http://na.org.au) for **Narcotics Anonymous Australia**, a non profit organisation that helps people abstain from drugs.

## INFORMATION AND ADVICE

For free and confidential advice about alcohol and other drugs 24 hours, 7 days a week, call the **National Alcohol and Other Drug hotline: 1800 250 015**.

It will automatically direct you to the Alcohol and Drug Information Service in the state or territory you are calling from.

Call **ADIS** for the nearest needle and syringe program (NSP) outlet.

**Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council** provides links to Aboriginal community controlled health services across NSW. Visit [www.ahmrc.org.au](http://www.ahmrc.org.au) for

information about AHMRC members including a regional map, information and links to members websites.

**Drug and Alcohol Multicultural Education Centre (DAMEC)** provides services for people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Contact DAMEC on (02) 8113 1301 or for counselling and support services for CALD communities call (02) 8706 0150.

**Drug Info** provides facts and resources on alcohol and other drugs and the prevention of related harm. Visit [www.druginfo.adf.org.au](http://www.druginfo.adf.org.au)

**State Library of New South Wales Drug Info** provides up to date information on alcohol and other drugs in public libraries throughout NSW. Visit [www.druginfo.sl.nsw.gov.au](http://www.druginfo.sl.nsw.gov.au)

**eheadspace** provides mental health and wellbeing support, information and services for young people (12 - 25 years) and their family and friends. Visit [www.eheadspace.org.au](http://www.eheadspace.org.au)

**Family Drug Support** provides 24-7 telephone support to families in crisis due to drug and alcohol issues. Call the Helpline on 1300 368 186 or visit [www.fds.org.au](http://www.fds.org.au)

**Kids Helpline** is a free, 24 hour counselling service for young people aged 5 to 25 years. Counselling is offered via the Kids Helpline website [www.kidshelp.com.au](http://www.kidshelp.com.au) or email, or call 1800 55 1800.

**Nepean Youth Drug and Alcohol Service (NYDAS)** works within a holistic model of care to address a range of issues for young people (12 - 20 years of age) related to their alcohol and other drug use. Call (02) 4734 2129 or (02) 4734 1333.

**NSW Poisons Information Centre** provides the latest poisons information to the public, and toxicology advice to health professionals on the management of poisoned and envenomed patients. Telephone advice is available 24/7 on 131126 from anywhere in Australia.

**NSW Users and AIDS Association (NUAA)** is a peak drug user organisation in NSW providing harm reduction information and blood borne virus prevention peer education. Visit [www.nuaa.org.au](http://www.nuaa.org.au)

**ReachOut** is an Australian online youth mental health service with a mobile-friendly site and forums where you can access help, information and support. Visit [au.reachout.com](http://au.reachout.com)

**Sexual Health Info Link** provides free and confidential sexual health support and information. Visit [www.shil.nsw.gov.au](http://www.shil.nsw.gov.au)

**Smart Recovery** is a voluntary self-help group that assists people in recovering from alcohol, drug use and other addictive behaviours. Visit [www.smartrecoveryaustralia.com.au](http://www.smartrecoveryaustralia.com.au)

**TAFE NSW** provides help with education, career development or personal matters. Students can contact a local TAFE/university counsellor. Visit [www.tafensw.edu.au](http://www.tafensw.edu.au)

**Youth Action** is the peak organisation for young people in NSW. Visit [www.youthaction.org.au](http://www.youthaction.org.au) and use the search option to access a directory of NSW youth services.

**Youth Solutions** provides services for young people 12 to 25 years of age and the community including prevention and health promotion, drug and alcohol education, community programs and information and referral. Visit [www.youthsolutions.com.au](http://www.youthsolutions.com.au) or call (02) 4628 2319 [provides services to young people in Macarthur & Wingecarribee].

**NSW Health aims to reduce drug-related harm for individuals and the community by providing the facts, including the possible health, social and economic consequences of using alcohol and other drugs.**

