

Ketamine

FACT SHEET

Ketamine is also known as:

- K
- Ket
- Special K
- Riddle
- Spesh
- Vitamin K
- Smack K
- Kit-Kat
- Keller
- Barry Keddle
- Horse Tranquilizer
- Kurdamin
- HOSS
- The Hoos
- Hossalar
- Kiddie
- Wonk
- Regreta
- Tranq

Ketamine is most often used legally as an anesthetic by veterinarians and doctors. Recent research suggests that ketamine may also be useful in treating alcoholism, heroin addiction, migraines, and depression. Ketamine is a highly addictive drug that results in a psychological state of separation between the self and reality. Its effects include out of body experiences, feeling dreamy, a sense of vertigo, or reduced sensations. Ketamine is usually produced in liquid form, but can also be made into white crystals or a powder that is physically similar to cocaine. It can be snorted, taken orally, smoked with marijuana, or injected into muscle, and is often used along with other drugs like ecstasy, heroin, or cocaine. Access to ketamine is limited because it is a physician-prescribed drug.

What are the harmful effects of Ketamine?

Ketamine use is particularly harmful when used together with alcohol. It can produce dry mouth and result in nervousness, a racing heart, nausea, hallucinations, vomiting and potentially fatal respiratory problems. With regular use, users can experience paranoia and become self-absorbed. Users may also experience disruptions in consciousness, near-death experiences, cognitive fragmentation, memory or behavioral disturbances, disintegration of skeletal muscle, unusually high body temperature, seizures, or neurosis - a disorder that can result in feelings of anxiety, obsessive thoughts, or compulsive acts. Although the direct effects of ketamine tend to last for under one hour, indirect effects can be long lasting, taking up to 24 hours to wear off. Users develop tolerance to the drug quickly, resulting in the need for increasingly large doses to feel the same effects. Users of ketamine risk becoming psychologically addicted to it, using it compulsively. Use of ketamine also increases the risk of physical injury and sexual assault as it is sometimes used as a date rape drug.

What is a 'K-hole'?

With high doses of ketamine, a user can experience what is known as a 'K-hole' in which they enter a highly dissociative state. During this state, the self becomes completely separated from reality and the user loses a sense of their own identity. When in a K-hole, users may find it very difficult to move and some users may not even be aware of having a body or be able to control it. Users do not always recall experiencing a K-hole, but when they do, they report being in another reality. During this experience, users are unable to move, think, or function.

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A 2003 BC study found an increased risk of ketamine use among participants who identified as gay, lesbian, or bisexual.

(Lampinen, McGhee, & Martin, 2006)

In an American study of 'rave subcultures', 61% of participants reported snorting ketamine.

(McCaughan, Carlson, Falck&Siegal, 2005)



Centre for Public Safety and
Criminal Justice Research

33844 King Road
Abbotsford, BC
V2S 7M8

604 854-4553
<http://cjr.ufv.ca>

Is ketamine use a problem in Canada?

Since ketamine is difficult to access, costly, and difficult to produce, it is a rarely used drug in Canada, although police seizures of ketamine have increased recently. In the 1990s, it became known as a party or club drug due to its popular recreational use at large dance parties. Ketamine is often sold in pill form as 'ecstasy' leading to accidental use by some people who are unaware of the true contents of the pill.

Resources

- Canada Gazette
<http://canadagazette.gc.ca/>
- Kely Mental Health Resource Centre
<http://kelymentalhealth.ca/>
- Canadian Mental Health Association
<http://www.cmha.ca/>
- Mind Check
<http://mindcheck.ca/>
- McCaughan, J.A., Carlson, R.G., Falck, R.S., & Siegal, H.A. (2005). From "Candy kids" to "Chemi-kids": A typology of young adults who attend raves in the Midwestern United States. *Substance Use & Misuse*, 40: 1503-1523.
- Lampinen, T.M., McGhee, D., & Martin, I. (2006). Increased risk of "club" drug use among gay and bisexual high school students in British Columbia. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 38: 458-461.