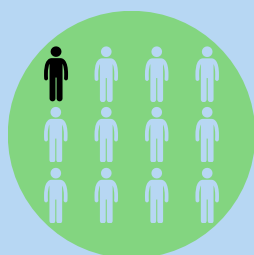


Substances At A Glance: Ketamine

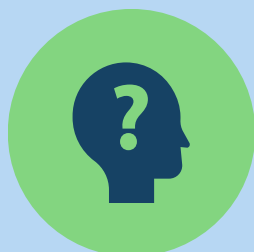
Liquid ketamine was developed in the early 1960's as an anesthetic for surgeries. It is both a sedative and a hallucinogen.



What is Ketamine? Ketamine hydrochloride, also known as “Special K,” is a powerful sedative and hallucinogen. It is widely used in animal tranquilizers by veterinarians. Ketamine prevents the brain from properly receiving nerve messages and can change how a person understands the world around them. It can be mixed with other smoked drugs (tobacco, cannabis, etc.), mixed into a drink, snorted or injected.¹



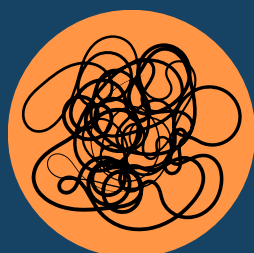
Ketamine use among youth: Research into prevalence rates of ketamine use specifically among youth is limited and is often included among hallucinogen use (4% among high school aged youth,² 8% among post-secondary aged youth).³



Why do young people use ketamine? After its early use was found to trigger powerful hallucinations, ketamine began to be used more recreationally by people at raves or parties. It's still used by veterinarians for surgery on animals, but recreationally it's used by people to party or experience powerful trips. Due to its powerful side effects, ketamine may also be used by sexual predators as a rape drug.¹



Short and long-term effects: When taken in small doses, ketamine can have stimulating effects; people using it may experience hallucinations, numbness or a sense of 'floating.' Blurry vision may occur, and people report seeing things that leave behind visual copies when they move (known as 'seeing trails'). Long term use of Ketamine is also connected with bladder inflammation, issues with urination, flashbacks, impaired memory, and issues with attention and sociability.



What is a 'bad trip?' Sometimes, a person taking hallucinogens like Ketamine may begin to experience negative effects that can become emotionally or psychologically overwhelming, referred to as a 'bad trip.' These effects can include extreme paranoia and mood swings, negative/terrifying hallucinations or negative interpretations of reality. These can cause anxiety or panic attacks or psychotic episodes, or cause a person to do extreme, dangerous and unpredictable things.⁴



Substances At A Glance: Ketamine

Hallucinogens like ketamine have recently gained more attention for their potential to support mental health, but more research is still needed into their effects and risks.



Ketamine and the law: Ketamine sale, production, possession and use is illegal in Canada except for its medical uses by licensed professional healthcare providers and scientific researchers.¹



What are the risks of ketamine use? Ketamine use can cause a person to act more impulsively, increasing the risks of accidental injury. Ketamine slows down the nervous system, which can cause weak breathing as well as loss of consciousness/coma, leaving a person vulnerable to assaults. Ketamine can increase cause increased blood pressure, bladder issues, vomiting and issues with memory.⁵



How can someone reduce the risks of ketamine use? Ketamine should only be used as directed and supervised by a healthcare provider. Designate a driver if you plan to travel after using ketamine. Seek medical assistance if you feel unwell while using. Ketamine should not be mixed with other drugs, especially alcohol, opioids or other sedatives.



How can I help my kids understand the risks of ketamine? Since ketamine is odorless and can be added to drinks without someone knowing, remind youth of the importance of only accepting drinks from trusted sources and not leaving a beverage unattended. If they are curious about using ketamine for their mental health, talk about other healthy strategies and help them connect with a healthcare provider to consider all their options.



Esketamine & The Special Access Program (SAP): Medical ketamine (brand name Spravato) can be accessed in Canada for the treatment of moderate to severe major depressive disorder where patients have not responded to other treatment, or where urgent psychiatric care is required. It is not recommended for anyone under the age of 25 due to its potential for misuse or addiction, as well as an increased risk of suicidal thoughts or actions.⁶

Reference List

1. Health Canada, 2023. [Ketamine](#).
2. Government of Canada, 2025. [Canadian Student Alcohol and Drugs Survey, 2023-2024](#).
3. Government of Canada, 2024. [Canadian Post-Secondary Education Alcohol & Drug Use Survey 2021-2022](#).
4. Center for Addiction and Mental Health, 2012. [Ketamine](#).
5. American Addiction Centers, 2024. [Ketamine: Short and Long Term Effects of Ketamine](#).
6. Johnson & Johnson, 2024. [Spravato](#).