

What it looks like

It usually comes as a white powder. Sometimes it is in tablet form and sold as ecstasy, or it can be a liquid. It often has a designer logo similar to those found on ecstasy tablets.

How it's taken

It is normally taken as a tablet, but it can be swallowed as a liquid. It can also be inhaled or injected.

What it does

Ketamine has been used in clinical practice for over 30 years, and is a powerful anaesthetic with short-term medical effects on humans and animals. A large dose can send people to sleep, while a smaller dose can create a feeling of numbness and an 'out of body' experience and hallucinations.

Addiction

As users get used to the drug, they may need to take larger doses to achieve the same effect. Ketamine is linked with a strong physiological addiction (the addiction is in the mind, not the body), similar to that which can be experienced by cocaine users. But physical 'withdrawal' side-effects are not severe, as it is not associated with strong physical addiction.



How long the effects last

Usually, the effects may last for up to an hour and users may experience the after-effects for several hours.

Risks

Physically it can cause problems with vision and loss of co-ordination. Hallucinations may distort objects and reality and sometimes the user can only be helped by being reassured and helped by other people.

Users can also put themselves in danger due to the numbing effect of this drug, which can make them not feel pain and not be aware of being hurt.

Ketamine is particularly dangerous if used with depressants such as alcohol. This can create problems because it's popular in clubs and at raves. It can also make some existing mental-health problems worse.

If you take ketamine in high doses and mix it with another depressant such as alcohol, it can make breathing difficult and stop your heart from working properly and can lead to unconsciousness and even death. People can also die from swallowing their vomit.

If you use ketamine for a long time, this can cause disorientation, mental deterioration and make you detached from reality. However, we do not understand the long-term effects. Reports suggest that flashbacks can happen. You can also suffer from a loss of memory, lowered attention span and blurred vision.

What to do in an emergency

Don't delay – phone 999 immediately.

If you think someone has overdosed on drugs, tell the operator what drugs they've taken (if you know).

What not to do

- Don't cause pain or another injury.
- Don't give them other drugs.
- Don't put them in a shower or bath.
- Don't walk them around.
- Don't leave them on their own.

Always follow the operator's instructions.

And remember, if you have any doubt always call 999. It could save the person's life.

What the law says

Ketamine is a classified drug. For the current classification and information about the consequences of using or supplying ketamine, go to www.knowthescore.info.

Fact: by law, passing drugs to someone else, including friends, is classed as supplying.

Fact: some countries may refuse visas to people who have drug convictions.

Getting more information

Phone the free and confidential 'Know the Score' information line on **0800 587 5879**, to speak to a trained advisor. Someone is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Calls from landlines are free and will not show up on the phone bill. Or, you can visit the 'Know the Score' website at www.knowthescore.info.

Both the information line and the website can provide information about local services. Also, you can ask your GP to refer you to a specialist drugs service. To find a drug service in your area visit www.scottishdrugservices.com.

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