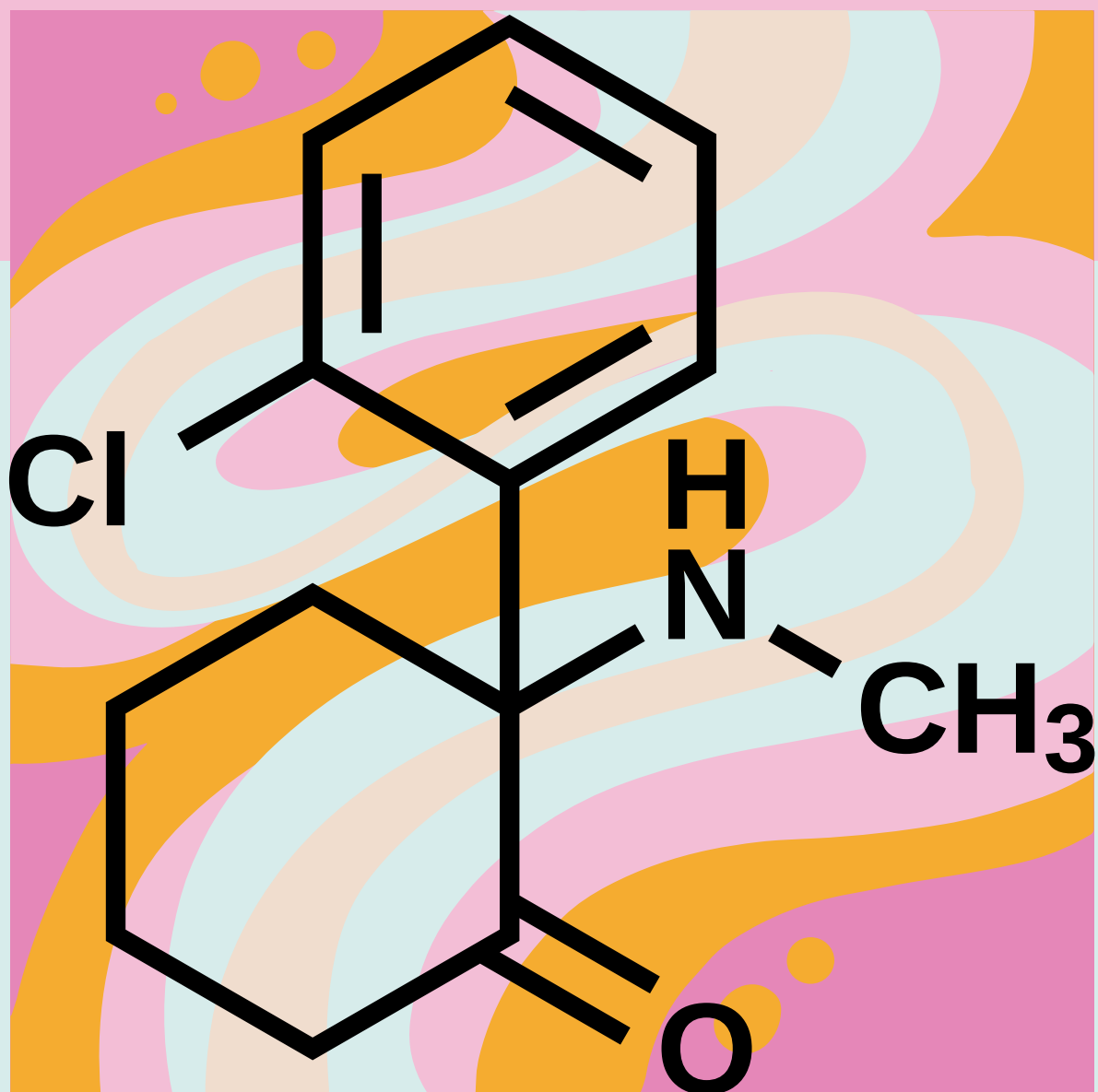
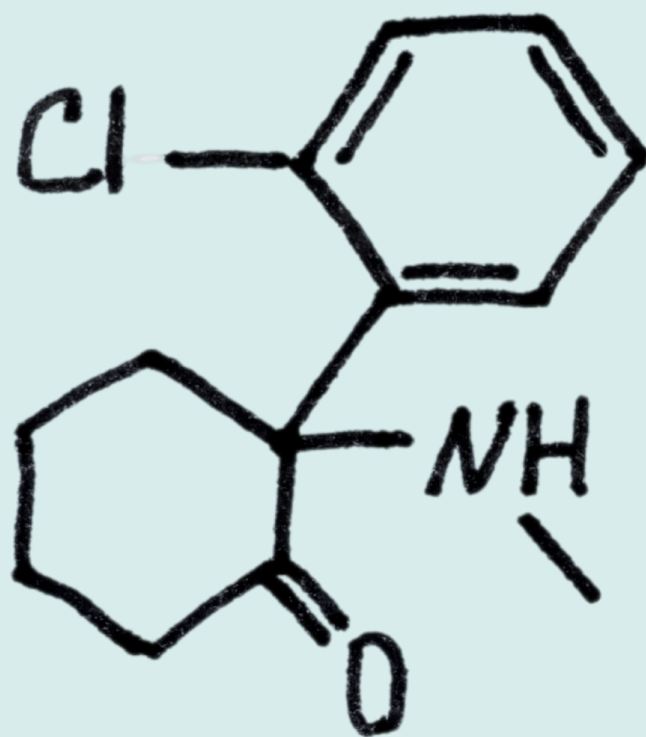


BARNSELY
RECOVERY STEPS



KETAMINE
HANDBOOK

Ketamine



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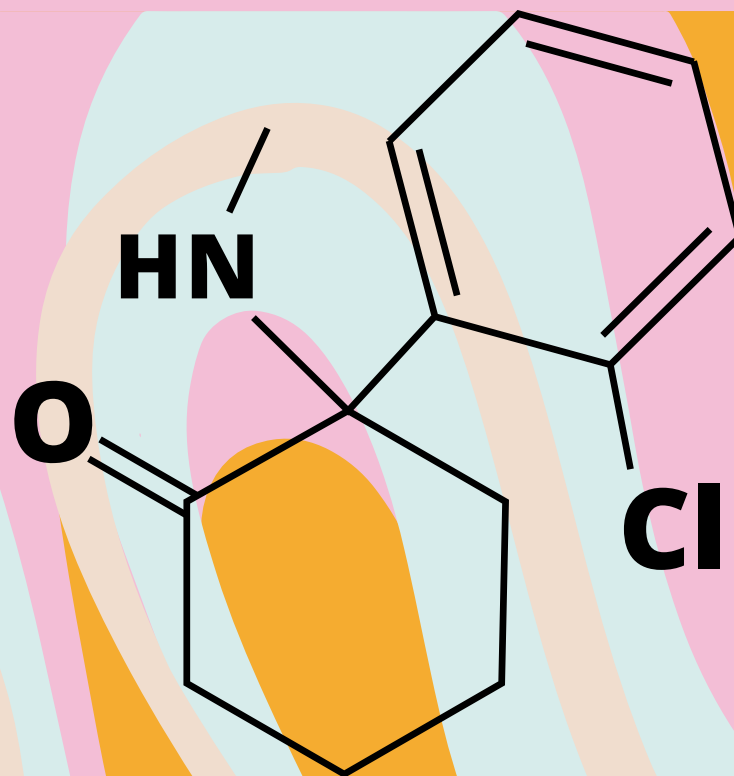
01. WHAT IS KETAMINE?

Ketamine is a powerful drug that started off as an anaesthetic for surgeries and pain relief. Today, it's still used in hospitals to manage severe pain and, sometimes, in mental health treatment for depression. But outside of medical settings, ketamine has become a popular recreational drug—often called “Special K” or just “K”—for its intense, out-of-body effects.

When people take ketamine recreationally, they are usually after that “floating” sensation and a feeling of detachment from reality. It can alter the way people experience time and space, making it a common choice in the club scene. However, ketamine is also unpredictable and can lead to some risky side effects. Users may feel confused, lose control, or even forget what happened, which puts them at risk of accidents or other dangerous situations.

Long-term use comes with some serious health issues, too. Ketamine is known to cause “ketamine bladder syndrome,” which makes urinating painful and can even damage their bladder and kidneys. It's also linked to mental health struggles, like depression and anxiety, and can mess with their memory and focus over time.

In the UK, ketamine is a Class B drug, meaning it's illegal to possess, sell, or use it without a prescription.



02. A BRIEF HISTORY OF KETAMINE IN THE UK



Ketamine has had quite the journey! It was first developed in the 1960s as a safer anaesthetic and quickly became a go-to drug in hospitals and even in war zones because it could numb pain without knocking out the body's natural breathing reflex. By the '70s, it was widely used in UK hospitals, especially for surgeries and emergency care.

Fast forward to the 1990s, and ketamine started to pop up in clubs and at festivals in the UK. People were drawn to its unique effects, like feeling “out of body” or the intense experience called a “K-hole.” As its recreational use grew, so did awareness of the risks—and by 2006, ketamine was officially classified as a Class C drug in the UK, making it illegal to possess or sell without a prescription.

But it didn't stop there. As more people started using ketamine recreationally, doctors and researchers saw a rise in serious health issues, like the now well-known "ketamine bladder syndrome."

In 2014, to reflect its risks, ketamine was reclassified as a Class B drug with tougher penalties for misuse.

Recently, though, ketamine has found a surprising new role in mental health treatment. Small, controlled doses in medical settings have shown promise for people struggling with severe depression or PTSD. While it's gaining ground as a treatment option, recreational ketamine remains illegal in the UK without a prescription, mostly due to its risks and potential for harm.

03.

THE EFFECTS OF KETAMINE

Ketamine can have a wide range of effects on the mind and body. Some people are drawn to its unique, “out-of-body” sensations, but it’s important to understand all the potential effects—both the ones you might expect and the ones you don’t. Here’s what ketamine can do in the short and long term:

SHORT-TERM EFFECTS

After taking ketamine, the effects usually kick in quickly—often within minutes. Here’s what people may experience in the short term:

DISSOCIATION

This is the most commonly sought effect and can make people feel detached from their body or like they’re observing themselves from the outside. People often describe this as a “dream-like” or “floating” sensation.

VISUAL AND SENSORY DISTORTION

Ketamine can change how they see and feel things around them, with distorted visuals, sounds, or even a change in the way time seems to pass.

THE “K-HOLE”

In higher doses, ketamine can produce an intense dissociative state known as the “K-hole.” This feels like being completely disconnected from reality and can be frightening for some, as it may come with confusion, immobility, or a loss of control.

NUMBNESS AND SEDATION

Ketamine is an anaesthetic, so it can cause physical numbness and make people’s muscles feel heavy or difficult to control. This is why people are prone to falls or injuries when using ketamine.

CONFUSION AND MEMORY LOSS

During or after taking ketamine, it’s common to feel confused or even forget what happened while they were under its effects.

LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF KETAMINE

Ketamine is known to damage the bladder, leading to cystitis and bladder shrinkage. This can, in turn, cause irreversible kidney damage. Complications from ketamine use can result in frequent hospital admissions, often developing over a short period and leading to chronic pain that is difficult to manage.

KETAMINE BLADDER SYNDROME

One of the most serious long-term effects, “ketamine bladder” is painful and damaging. Frequent users may experience difficulty urinating, blood in the urine, and chronic bladder pain. In severe cases, it can lead to permanent kidney damage and the need for surgery.

MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

Long-term ketamine use has been linked to increased anxiety, depression, and cognitive problems. Some people also report having trouble with memory and focus over time.

TOLERANCE AND DEPENDENCE

While ketamine is not known to be physically addictive, people can develop a psychological dependence, where they feel they “need” ketamine to cope or relax. Over time, users may also need larger doses to feel the same effects, which can lead to riskier use and more side effects.

DIMINISHED SENSITIVITY TO PAIN

With frequent use, some people develop a reduced sensitivity to physical pain. While this might sound harmless, it can make it harder to notice injury or illness.

RISKS OF OVERDOSE

Ketamine overdoses are rare but can happen, especially if it's mixed with other substances like alcohol or other depressants. Signs of overdose include extreme sedation, confusion, inability to speak, and breathing difficulties. If you notice these signs, seek medical help immediately.

SUMMARY

The effects of ketamine vary widely, from mild sensory changes to intense dissociation. While some people may use ketamine for a particular experience, it's essential to be aware of all its effects and the potential risks that can come with short- and long-term use. If you know someone who is dealing with unwanted effects from ketamine, support and guidance are available.

O4. RISKS AND HARM REDUCTION FOR KETAMINE USE

While ketamine has its medical uses, using it recreationally carries some real risks. Here are some ways to reduce harm and stay safer.

UNDERSTANDING THE RISKS

Ketamine's effects can feel pretty intense. Because it's a dissociative, it can make people feel disconnected from their body or surroundings, which can lead to risky situations. Here are some things to keep in mind:

ACCIDENTS AND INJURIES:

Ketamine's effects make it easy to get hurt without even realizing it—like tripping, falling, or wandering into unsafe places.

BLADDER AND KIDNEY DAMAGE:

Known as “ketamine bladder,” long-term use can cause severe bladder pain, make it difficult to pee, and even damage the kidneys.

MENTAL HEALTH STRUGGLES:

Regular use can lead to issues like depression, anxiety, or memory problems.

DEPENDENCE:

While not everyone becomes dependent, some people find it difficult to cut back or stop using ketamine, especially if they rely on it for certain feelings.

TIPS TO REDUCE HARM

If you work with someone who chooses to use ketamine, there are ways to minimise some of these risks. Here are a few harm reduction tips:

START SMALL

With ketamine, less is more. They should start with a small amount and see how it affects them. It can be easy to take too much, especially since it affects everyone differently.

STAY IN A SAFE ENVIRONMENT

Because ketamine can make people lose awareness, so they should use it in a safe, familiar place with people they trust. They should avoid taking it alone and make sure someone's around to look out for them if they start feeling unwell.

GIVE THEIR BODY A BREAK

Using ketamine frequently can take a toll on people's body, especially their bladder. Try to give themselves breaks to let their system recover and avoid long-term health issues.

AVOID MIXING WITH OTHER SUBSTANCES

Ketamine doesn't mix well with other substances, especially alcohol and depressants, which can make people overly sedated or lead to dangerous side effects. Stick to ketamine on its own to reduce these risks.

STAY HYDRATED

Drinking water can help people's bodies flush out the ketamine, which might ease some of the strain on their bladder. But don't overdo it—balance is key.

ENCOURAGE THEM TO LISTEN TO THEIR BODY

Ketamine can sometimes mask physical pain, so if they start feeling unwell or their body's telling them something doesn't feel right, take it seriously. Pain in the bladder, for example, is a red flag that it's time to take a break.

05. RECOGNISING KETAMINE USE: SIGNS TO LOOK OUT FOR

Ketamine affects people in unique ways, and spotting the signs of use can sometimes be tricky. Here are some signs that someone may be using ketamine.

SHORT-TERM SIGNS OF KETAMINE USE

When someone has recently used ketamine, you may notice certain behaviours or physical signs that appear while they're still feeling the effects:

Unsteady Movements

Ketamine often causes people to feel physically disconnected or heavy, so they may stumble, appear uncoordinated, or even seem unable to move smoothly.

Vacant or "Spaced Out" Look

People using ketamine might look as though they're "somewhere else" mentally, appearing disconnected from their surroundings or unresponsive.

Confusion or Disorientation

Users can become easily confused or forgetful, finding it difficult to focus or respond clearly to questions. They may seem lost in thought or struggle to engage in conversations.

Slow or Slurred Speech

Ketamine's sedative effects often make people speak more slowly or with a slight slur, as though they're very relaxed or even sleepy.

Strange Visual or Sensory Experiences

Because ketamine distorts perception, some users may seem fascinated by small details or distracted by sights and sounds others don't notice. They may even comment on "seeing" or "hearing" things differently.

LONG-TERM SIGNS OF REGULAR KETAMINE USE

If someone has been using ketamine regularly, you may start to notice some longer-term patterns in their behaviour or health:

Frequent Bathroom Trips or Bladder Complaints

Regular ketamine use can cause bladder issues, like pain during urination or needing to go more often. Some people may complain about these symptoms or be more secretive about frequent trips to the bathroom.

Changes in Mood or Mental Health

Long-term ketamine use is linked to mood changes, including increased depression, anxiety, and irritability. People may seem withdrawn, lose interest in things they used to enjoy, or struggle with low energy and motivation.

Memory and Focus Problems

Ketamine can affect memory and concentration over time, so you might notice someone becoming more forgetful, having difficulty keeping track of things, or struggling with tasks that require focus.

Social Withdrawal

People using ketamine frequently may begin to pull back from social activities, preferring to be alone or limiting interactions to certain settings, such as party or club scenes where they feel comfortable using.

06. SUPPORT

If you're supporting someone who uses ketamine, it's important to know that help is available. Whether you need guidance on harm reduction, information on the risks, or support with reducing use, specialist services we are ready to assist.

BARNSELEY RECOVERY STEPS

At Barnsley Recovery Steps, we provide free, confidential support for individuals affected by drug use, including ketamine. If you're working with people who use ketamine and need guidance, we're here to help. You can refer someone to our service or contact us for advice on harm reduction and treatment options.

Contact:

Phone: 01226 779066

Website: www.barnsleyrecoverysteps.org.uk

Email: brs.referrals@waythrough.org.uk

Social media: LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram

We also offer training for professionals looking to expand their knowledge of ketamine use and effective support strategies. Get in touch to learn more!

WHAT CAN YOU EXPECT?

When you refer someone to our service, they'll be welcomed by a friendly and understanding team member. We provide tailored support, whether they want to reduce their ketamine use, stay safe, become abstinent, or simply learn more. Our approach is person-centred—offering guidance without pressure, just the right support at the right time.

THEY DON'T HAVE TO DO THIS ALONE

Reaching out for support can be a big step for the people you work with, but they don't have to do it alone. **It's OK to ask for help.** At Barnsley Recovery Steps, we're here to support them every step of the way, providing the care and guidance they need.

07. TREATMENT JOURNEY

Support for ketamine users includes:

- A comprehensive assessment of a person's substance use, health, mental well-being, and social situation.
- Fast Track sessions for those looking to reduce their use or stay safer.
- Personalised care planning with a Recovery Navigator to tailor their support.
- Referrals to additional services that meet their needs.
- Specialist mental health support from our Integrated Recovery Team if they have complex needs.
- One-to-one sessions to help their reduce use, manage cravings, and make lasting changes.
- Group support led by our team.
- Mutual aid and peer-led groups specifically focused on ketamine.
- Community groups and events to build connections.
- A health check, including weight, blood pressure, and blood tests.
- A clinical assessment to explore detox options with medication to ease symptoms.
- Access to residential rehab programmes if needed.



