

# Patient Information

## Ketamine

### What is ketamine?

Ketamine is a medicine that was first used as an anaesthetic. It has since been found that in small doses it can be helpful in reducing certain types of pain. It works by preventing pain ‘messages’ being sent to the brain along the spinal cord.

It is usually prescribed when other types of pain relief such as opioids (e.g. morphine) or other nerve pain relieving medications have not worked. It may be prescribed by itself, or in combination with other pain-relieving medications. Although ketamine is not licensed in New Zealand to treat pain, it has been used effectively for many years by doctors who specialise in pain control.

### How is ketamine administered?

Ketamine comes as a clear liquid that can be taken by mouth (oral). It does have an unpleasant taste so we recommend diluting it in a flavoured drink. It can also be given by injection under the skin (subcutaneous), as a continuous infusion using a small portable battery-operated pump called a syringe driver. Very occasionally ketamine is given directly into a vein for severe pain or for a painful procedure. The way it is given will depend on your circumstances.

Ketamine is usually started as an inpatient in a place that specialises in pain control (e.g. Hospice) so that the response and side effects can be monitored closely. Your dose will be adjusted to find the correct dose for you. Once we know if ketamine works for your pain, and how much you need, you may continue to take it at home.

Sometimes ketamine is used in short bursts and then stopped. The pain relief can continue for some days, weeks or even months following this. If the pain returns, another ‘burst’ of ketamine can be given.

Occasionally ketamine is mixed with ointments or creams and applied directly on skin or mouth ulcers.

	<b>SIDE EFFECT:</b>	<b>RECOMMENDED ACTION:</b>
<b>Are there are side effects from taking Ketamine?</b>	<b>Drowsiness/feeling ‘drunk’ (this often wears off within a few days).</b>	Tell your doctor or palliative care team if bothersome.
	<b>Vivid dreams or hallucinations (feeling, seeing or hearing something that is not actually there).</b>	Tell your doctor or palliative care team
	<b>Double vision.</b>	A small dose of a medication called haloperidol may help prevent this.
	<b>Liver issues.</b>	Tell your doctor.
	<b>Skin irritation (if given by continuous injection under the skin).</b>	Your doctor may arrange blood tests to monitor this. This usually recovers when ketamine is stopped.
	<b>Bladder issues e.g. pain/stinging, or blood in the urine.</b>	Tell your nurse if you have any redness or discomfort.
<b>Can I take other medicines together with Ketamine?</b>	<p>If you are already taking a strong opioid such as morphine, your doctor will usually reduce the dose of this. This is because you may not need the same amount of strong opioid while taking ketamine.</p> <p>Certain medicines can affect the dose of Ketamine that you require. Any doctor prescribing medicines for you should check that additional medications can be safely taken with Ketamine. If you buy ‘over the counter’ medicines from a pharmacy, always tell the pharmacist that you are taking Ketamine.</p>	
<b>What do I do if I forget to take a regular dose of oral Ketamine?</b>	Take the dose as soon as you remember. Do not take a double dose to make up for the missed one. If you are sick within 30 minutes of taking a dose of Ketamine repeat the dose as soon as you feel better. If you miss more than one dose through being unwell, contact your doctor.	
<b>Where should I keep my Ketamine?</b>	Store the medication in a safe and secure location in a cool place away from sunlight (out of reach and sight of children, preferably in a locked cupboard). Return any unwanted/unused medication to your community pharmacy for safe disposal.	

**Getting prescriptions for ketamine**

Your doctor will give you a prescription for ketamine when you go home. It is a controlled drug which means that prescribing is more tightly controlled. Once you are on a stable dose, your General Practitioner (GP) may be able to provide ongoing prescriptions for you.

**Can I drive while taking ketamine?**

Taking ketamine does not automatically mean that you cannot drive. People who take the same amount of ketamine every day for pain are usually fit to drive. However, when you first start taking ketamine or when your dose is increased you may feel drowsy. You should not drive if you feel drowsy.

**Can I drink alcohol?**

Yes. It is quite safe to drink alcohol and take ketamine together but the combination can make you feel very sleepy or drunk much sooner than usual.

**Will I become addicted to ketamine?**

No. There is no evidence that ketamine taken for pain causes addiction. If you need to stop taking ketamine it should be stopped slowly with advice from your doctor. This is because stopping it suddenly can result in the pain coming back quickly and this can be severe.

**What if I get more pain when taking ketamine?**

Talk to your Doctor or Nurse. It may be that they need to adjust your dose of ketamine, or one of the other pain medications you are taking.

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