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PSYCHIATRY

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PATIENT EDUCATION

Ketamine

Supervised off-label psychiatric treatment / FDA-approved anesthetic formulations

A guide for adults considering or receiving ketamine treatment.
Follow the instructions from your treating healthcare team.

DEPRESSION TREATMENT IS OFF-LABEL

NO DRIVING FOR AT LEAST 24 HOURS · AND UNTIL RECOVERED

Formulations: Psychiatric care may use a supervised IV or other clinician-directed regimen. Compounded oral or nasal preparations differ in absorption, quality controls, and evidence. Do not convert between routes yourself.

What it is used for

Ketamine is FDA-approved as an anesthetic. Clinicians use it off-label for some difficult-to-treat depression and other conditions. Compounded ketamine formulations have not been FDA-approved for psychiatric treatment.

Ketamine and the supervised esketamine nasal spray Spravato are different treatments with different evidence and requirements.

How it works

It blocks NMDA receptors involved in glutamate signaling. Psychiatric effects can occur relatively quickly, but an early response does not guarantee lasting benefit.

What to expect over time

Some people improve within hours to days. Benefits may fade and require a continuing treatment plan; others do not respond. Follow-up should assess mood, functioning, safety, and adverse effects.

Taking your medication

- Follow the treating program's preparation, food, medication, and monitoring instructions.
- Arrange transportation and follow the specified period without driving or hazardous activity.
- Do not add doses or change route to extend an effect.
- Tell the team about alcohol, sedatives, and other substances before treatment.

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Side effects and safety

Possible side effects

- Dissociation or altered perception
- Dizziness, nausea, or vomiting
- Sedation or impaired coordination
- Increased blood pressure or pulse

Keeping track of treatment

Some side effects resolve with time; others may require a change of medication. Discuss persistent or bothersome side effects with your provider.

Monitoring should address blood pressure, breathing, alertness, and mental state. Repeated exposure also calls for review of urinary symptoms, cognition, and misuse or dependence.

If you take too much

For a suspected overdose, call Poison Control at **1-800-222-1222** immediately, even if you feel well. Call 911 for a seizure, collapse, trouble breathing, or inability to wake.

Before you start

Discuss cardiovascular disease, uncontrolled blood pressure, psychosis, substance use, bladder symptoms, and liver disease. Review pregnancy and breastfeeding before treatment.

Medicines and interactions

Review all your medications with your provider, including over-the-counter medicines and supplements. Have new medications checked before taking them.

Alcohol, opioids, benzodiazepines, and other sedatives can increase sedation and respiratory risks. Stimulants and other medicines may add blood-pressure effects. Do not independently stop prescribed medicines to prepare for treatment.

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Living with your treatment

When to get help

Emergency symptoms. Call 911 for severe breathing problems, inability to wake, chest pain, collapse, or a severe allergic reaction. During a supervised treatment, alert staff immediately.

Prompt medical advice. Report persistent frightening dissociation, new hallucinations outside treatment, urinary pain or blood, or worsening mood promptly.

If you feel unsafe or have thoughts of self-harm, call 911 or go to an emergency department.

Your questions answered

Is compounded ketamine FDA-approved for depression?
No. Off-label clinical use and an FDA-approved psychiatric formulation are different. Discuss the evidence, route, monitoring, and follow-up plan.

Does rapid improvement eliminate suicide risk?
No. Ongoing safety assessment and treatment are still necessary, including emergency care when indicated.

Everyday tips

Use one coordinated treatment plan and keep the team informed about other psychiatric care.

Record benefit and adverse effects between sessions.

Storage and safety

If any take-home formulation is prescribed, follow its exact label, keep it locked away, and never share it. Do not use a nonmedical or unverified preparation.

Sources

FDA: Compounding risk alerts, including ketamine
DailyMed: Ketamine injection prescribing information

Educational handout; does not replace your prescription or provider's recommendations.