

KETAMINE INFUSION

Q1 What is ketamine? Ketamine is used as an anaesthetic agent in high doses both in human and veterinary medicine; it is also known to be abused as a recreational drug. In smaller doses, it can be used to manage acute and chronic pain especially in those where the pain is so severe it is not controlled by other drugs.

Q2 What are the benefits of ketamine?

- An assessment tool: In some patients it is difficult to properly examine the painful part because they have a great deal of pain in response to things that are not normally painful such as touch (allodynia) and a stronger feeling of pain to pressure that would normally be just uncomfortable (hyperalgesia). Ketamine infusions can reduce pain and tenderness, allowing the underlying condition to be assessed.
- 'Pain-Relief: In the chronic pain population ketamine is a useful drug, although it is not effective in every patient. The pain relief that can occur with a "short ketamine infusion" often "breaks the cycle", and often lasts considerably longer than the infusion. In the case of nerve pain or complex regional pain syndromes (CRPS), ketamine has been reported to produce remissions in the pain and other symptoms lasting many months.
- Other: Ketamine can reduce withdrawal symptoms and make it easier to cope with reduced doses of other analgesics. There is emerging evidence that ketamine has an antidepressant action and that it can reduce compulsive/obsessive behaviours.

Q3 How is ketamine administered? The ketamine is usually given either by an intravenous (IV) or a subcutaneous (SC) infusion.

Q4 What are the possible side effects? The common side-effects you may experience are:

Dizziness, Light headedness, Blurred vision, Headache, Nausea & vomiting, Numbness / pins and needles, Elevated/lowered blood pressure, Feeling of impending doom, Injection site irritation/redness, Mood elevation, Increased/decreased heart rate, Nightmares / Bad dreams, Vivid dreams, Hallucinations and Disassociation.

- Ketamine hallucinations are usually described as vivid dreams and are mostly pleasant. Less than 10% report bad dreams, more often with bigger doses and described as a feeling of doom, travelling rapidly through a confined space or a "near death" experience.
- Liver function tests are often checked because high doses & long ketamine infusions may affect the liver.
- Ketamine will have a temporary effect on your memory. You should not enter into any legally binding agreements or make any life changing decisions while receiving ketamine or for 24 hours after the infusion is stopped.

Q5 What happens when the infusion begins? As Ketamine can cause side-effects, you will be given a premedication of clonidine and an anti-nausea medicine. The infusion will be started at a low dose and gradually increased at intervals depending upon your progress and how well you tolerate the drug until the target dose is reached. A nurse will be checking your breathing, heart rate and blood pressure regularly. The nurse will also be monitoring Pain scores and Sedation (sleepiness).

If you do experience any side-effects it is very important to tell the nurses in case we wish to reduce the rate of the infusion or even stop it for a short period. Once the infusion is stopped, any side effects will also stop, usually within an hour or two.

Q6 Can I eat and drink? While the infusion is running you are encouraged to self care. In fact after getting help to get on your feet you are encouraged to do as much as possible while having the infusion.

Q7 How soon can I expect results? Different people respond differently; some may benefit within 8 hours, others can take two to five days before you notice any reduction in pain or improvement. Some may not benefit at all.

Q8 How long will pain relief last? The duration of benefit varies between people. Pain relief may last days, weeks, several months or longer, while some patients may obtain no improvement at all.

Q9 Do I continue my other pain killers during the ketamine infusion? You must let us know of all drugs you are taking, both prescribed and not prescribed, including recreational drugs. You will usually stay on your normal dose of pain killers until the ketamine is started. The dose of the other pain killers is usually reduced or stopped during the infusion depending upon our treatment goal.

Self-medication with ANY non-prescribed drugs or marijuana during the infusion is not permitted.

Q10 When can I resume normal activities at home such as driving? You must not drive a car, operate machinery, drink alcohol or make important decisions for at least 12 – 24 hours. Occasionally, drowsiness may persist for longer and driving should be delayed until this effect has worn off.

Q11 What if I feel ‘down in the dumps’, irritable or depressed after the infusion? Patients often report feeling brighter and happier for some weeks or months and then have feelings of increased depression or uncomfortable thoughts. This may mean the treatment is wearing off and that you need to see your doctor or have another treatment. Speak to your doctor, pharmacist, LifeLine (T:131114) or Beyond Blue (T:1800551800) if you need help.