

Ketamine Therapy Guide



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Background: Medical And Psychiatric Use Of Ketamine

Ketamine is only available by prescription from a medical provider, a physician, or a nurse practitioner. It is a drug regulated by the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) as a Schedule III medication and as such has long been used safely as an anesthetic and analgesic agent. Ketamine is also approved for use by the FDA, which has conducted evaluations of the risks and benefits associated with its use. The administration of ketamine in sub-anesthetic doses to treat depression, alcoholism, substance use disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and other psychiatric diagnoses is a relatively new, off-label use of ketamine. Ketamine is increasingly used as a treatment for various chronic treatment-resistant mental and emotional conditions, often used after other treatment approaches have been unsuccessful.

While the scientific data is not completely clear, research suggests ketamine may help grow new neural connections once diminished by chronic stress, leaving many people feeling relief. The literature indicates a 70% response rate to ketamine in patients with treatment-resistant depression, and a remission rate of 40-50%.

Ketamine As A Current Psychopharmacological Treatment

Ketamine for depression has become popularized through medical infusion clinics. At infusion clinics, a patient is administered ketamine through intravenous (IV), intramuscular (IM), or intra-nasal routes. Symptoms can be relieved through this process alone, but the underlying issues that caused the symptoms may persist.

I work in-office with sublingual ketamine. If you are interested in intramuscular injections these must be administered in a medical office by a doctor or nurse practitioner. Each type of administration has its own fee structure.

Ketamine treatment is generally considered inappropriate for persons with a history of psychosis, mania or schizophrenia, or who are currently taking benzodiazepines, stimulants, or MAOI's. Other contraindications are active substance abuse, severe liver dysfunction, significant coronary disease, and poorly controlled hypertension.

You will be required to undergo a medical clearance before being prescribed ketamine and your doctor and therapist will consult with each other to determine the best course of treatment.

The therapist works collaboratively with both you and the medical provider to come up with a treatment plan.

Ketamine Taken During Psychotherapeutic Treatment (KAP)

Interested in providing the most advanced and effective care for their patients, psychotherapists as well as physicians have studied the science and benefits related to ketamine. Some psychotherapists have begun integrating ketamine into their psychotherapeutic practices as an effective adjunctive path for healing, with the benefits of ketamine enhanced by a personalized approach and the support of a trusted psychotherapist.

While ketamine administered without psychotherapeutic assistance has helped with symptoms of mental and emotional problems, it is the belief of many clinicians that KAP with a skilled and experienced therapist can enhance the benefits of ketamine so that healing occurs at a deeper and longer-lasting level.

The use of ketamine within a personal therapeutic relationship can help the patient better identify and work through difficult experiences and behavior patterns, providing new insights and healing that might not have been possible otherwise. Ketamine-assisted psychotherapy may allow a person to gain access to the causes of their struggles that were previously outside their awareness.

Becoming A KAP Patient

Your medical provider, a physician or nurse practitioner who practices independently from, but coordinates your treatment plan with, your KAP therapist, will medically assess you to diagnose you and to ensure your safety when using ketamine. Your medical provider will also ask you to read and sign an informed consent document but with additional information about the physical and medical effects and potential side effects of ketamine. If in the judgment of that medical provider, you are assessed as an appropriate candidate for treatment with ketamine and KAP, you will then authorize your medical provider and your KAP psychotherapist to consult about how KAP might best work for you. You and your prescribing medical provider (not your KAP therapist) will decide on the dose and frequency of your ketamine; professional responsibility for those medical decisions lies exclusively with your prescribing medical provider.

Your KAP therapist will consult with your medical provider whose assessment will assist your KAP therapist to formulate a psychotherapeutic treatment plan to meet your particular KAP needs. Please be aware that while your medical provider and KAP therapist will be working in consultation with each other to assist you, they are each separate independent practitioners, each making their own independent assessments and each having exclusive responsibility for the separate aspects of your care that they each provide. The licensure and competence of your KAP psychotherapist is in providing psychotherapy including KAP, but not in prescribing or administering medications such as ketamine.

What To Expect In The KAP Experience

2.5-3 hours will be reserved for your KAP session. After you self-administer your prescribed sublingual ketamine in our office per your medical provider's instructions, your KAP psychotherapist will support and guide you as you encounter and explore emotional issues that arise during the KAP session. You agree to follow any direct instructions that your psychotherapist gives to you until the therapist says the session is over, and to stay at the location of the session until the therapist says you are ready to leave.

Ketamine is formally classified as a “dissociative” anesthetic, dissociation meaning a sense of disconnection from one’s ordinary experience of reality and self. At the dosage typically self-administered during KAP, most people experience mild anesthetic, anxiolytic (anxiety-reducing), antidepressant, and potentially, psychedelic effects though these latter effects are typically minimal. The antidepressant effect tends to have a cumulative effect, that is, be more sustained with repeated use. It has been speculated that dissociative experiences are associated with more significant and longer-lasting beneficial effects. This may also include a positive change in outlook and character that some describe as profound and transformative.

Please listen to this [podcast](#) for a wonderful explanation of ketamine and the ketamine experience.

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/psychoactive/id1574548562?i=1000547770844>

What To Expect In The KAP Experience

We tend to move through the daily humdrum of experience with our emotional walls up high, because it hasn't always felt safe to tune into what's really going on beneath the surface. General talk therapy supports a gradual undoing of this armoring, so we can access these deeper-seated emotions and get to the heart of our suffering as well as our potential. KAP can jumpstart this process and creates moments of emotional transformation. With KAP, many patients take a 'time out' from depressive thoughts, move through difficult experiences, and transform their pain into acceptance, hope and resolve. In the presence and safety of a trusted therapist—one who is already deeply attuned to a patient's intentions, hopes and pain—healing can happen much more quickly.

For some, visions and past memories may emerge in the KAP process. As a 'dissociative' medicine, ketamine allows many patients to process emotional waves in a way that offers them helpful separation from emotional pain that might normally feel intolerable. From this new birds-eye view and in the presence of a trusted therapist, individuals can observe their emotional suffering from a distance and reflect on their lives with an attitude of equanimity and curiosity instead of shutting down from feeling overwhelmed. Some have described the lower-dose KAP sessions to be dreamlike, deeply spiritual, accessing new sensations or visions. Many feel that such mind-altering ketamine experiences have facilitated a process of emotional release.

How to prepare and day of the session

Day of session. DO NOT EAT 6 HOURS BEFORE SESSION. You can bring a snack to eat after the session, while we are processing the session. If you have been prescribed an anti-nausea medication please take it 30 minutes prior to the session.

Setting intentions. While it is good to set intentions for your journey please remember to ease up on your expectations. Sometimes putting a lot of pressure on expectations can cause some energy blocks due to your focus on a specific area. I encourage clients to let go of expectations and trust and allow for whatever needs to unfold. The work occurs both in the medicine as well as the spaces between sessions. It's similar to working out - your body doesn't change after one yoga or workout class. The changes happen over time, with consistency, and during periods of rest.

Wear comfortable clothes. I encourage clients to wear something soft and comfortable as if you are lounging around. You will be lying on a sofa, with eye shades, and headphones playing soft and ambient music to support the journey process.

Please arrange a ride. I do not allow anyone to drive after a Ketamine session. Though you may feel okay to drive, you have taken a strong prescription medication that causes dissociation and drowsiness. You can arrange a ride or use a ride-share service.

Integration Sessions

KAP (Ketamine-Assisted Psychotherapy) integration session is a follow-up session that takes place after a ketamine-assisted psychotherapy session. It is designed to support the integration and processing of the experiences and insights gained during the psychedelic experience. Here's a description of what a KAP integration session may entail:

Safe and Supportive Environment: The integration session typically takes place in a calm and comfortable environment, such as a therapist's office or a suitable therapeutic setting. The therapist creates a safe and supportive space for the individual to share and process their experiences.

Reflection and Verbal Processing: The individual is encouraged to express and reflect upon their thoughts, emotions, and sensations that arose during the ketamine-assisted session. The therapist listens attentively, providing a non-judgmental and compassionate presence to facilitate open dialogue.

Integration of Insights: The therapist helps the individual make connections between the experiences in the ketamine-assisted session and their daily life, relationships, and personal goals. They assist in integrating the insights and wisdom gained from the psychedelic experience into a broader understanding and application in everyday life.

Integration Sessions

Emotional Support: The integration session offers emotional support for any challenging or difficult emotions that may have surfaced during the ketamine-assisted session. The therapist helps the individual explore and process these emotions, providing guidance on coping strategies and self-care techniques.

Cognitive Integration: The therapist helps the individual make sense of the transformative or paradigm-shifting experiences that may have occurred during the ketamine-assisted session. They assist in integrating these new perspectives into the individual's cognitive framework, fostering personal growth and a deeper understanding of self.

Goal Setting and Action Planning: The integration session provides an opportunity to set goals and develop action plans for personal development and integration of the insights gained. The therapist collaborates with the individual to identify practical steps and strategies for applying the newfound knowledge and understanding in their daily life.

Continued Support: Depending on the individual's needs, additional integration sessions may be scheduled to provide ongoing support and guidance in the process of assimilating the ketamine-assisted experiences into their overall healing and growth journey.