

Ketamine

Patient Information



This leaflet is to provide you information on ketamine: what it is, why we use it to treat pain, how you should take it and the possible side-effects.



Willen Hospice
always there to care

What is ketamine?

Ketamine is a medicine that was first used as an anaesthetic. It has since been found to be helpful in reducing pain from nerves (neuropathic pain). Ketamine is not licenced to treat nerve pain, but it has been used for many years by doctors who specialise in pain treatment.

Why have I been given ketamine for my pain?

Ketamine is used to help treat nerve pain, often in combination with other painkillers (such as morphine). It works by preventing pain 'messages' being sent to the brain along the spinal cord. It does this by blocking a pathway that transmits pain signals along the spinal cord itself.

Types of ketamine

Ketamine comes in two forms: a liquid that can be taken by mouth and an injection. The injectable form can be given in a syringe driver to provide a continuous infusion (through a needle under the skin).

Starting ketamine

Ketamine is usually started when you are in a place that specialises in pain control (such as the Hospice). The best way to give you your ketamine will be decided upon by your Hospice Doctor. If you take it by mouth, the starting dose is usually 10-20mg four times a day. If you have it by syringe driver, the starting dose is usually 100mg/day. It may be given as a short course (1-2 weeks), or for a longer time.

When you first take ketamine, you will be monitored in the Hospice, so that the dose can then be adjusted correctly (and quickly) and any side effects noted early. For some people, their pain will improve within hours of starting ketamine; for others this may take days or even weeks. Your dose will be adjusted by the Hospice Doctor to find the correct dose for you. Once we know that ketamine works for your pain, and how much you need, you may continue to take it at home.

What are the possible side effects? What can be done about them?

The most common side effects are:

- Drowsiness/feeling 'drunk' (this often wears off within a few days);
- Vivid dreams or hallucinations (seeing or hearing something that is not really there);
- Increase in blood pressure or heart rate (Your blood pressure and heart rate will be monitored when you start ketamine).

Rarer side effects:

- Ketamine can cause problems with your urinary tract, leading to pain/stinging when passing urine or blood in the urine. These symptoms are similar to urine infections but can lead to more serious problems if not recognised as being caused by ketamine. Let your specialist palliative care team or General Practitioner (GP) know if you experience any of these problems and remind them you are taking ketamine.
- Ketamine may also affect how your liver works. Your Doctor will arrange regular blood tests to monitor this. If this does happen, your liver function normally recovers when ketamine is stopped.

FAQs:

1. Who will prescribe my ketamine?

- If you are in the Hospice, one of the Hospice Doctors will prescribe your ketamine; when you go home, they will make sure you have two weeks' supply to take with you.
- When you are at home, your GP will prescribe the ketamine. Please bear in mind that it may take several days for the community pharmacist to order your prescription.

2. Should I continue to take my other medications with ketamine?

- Most medications can be continued alongside ketamine.
- However, if you are taking an 'opioid' painkiller (such as morphine, oxycodone or fentanyl), the dose of this will usually be reduced when you start ketamine. This is because ketamine can enhance the effects of opioids.
- When you start ketamine, your Doctor will tell you if any changes need to be made to your existing medications.

3. Can I drive while taking ketamine?

You may feel drowsy when first started on ketamine or for a short while when the dose is increased. If you feel drowsier or have problems concentrating do not drive until you feel better, and until you have spoken to your Doctor about it. If your Doctor says it is okay to drive, follow these guidelines:

- (a) Do not drive in the dark or in bad conditions.
- (b) Do not drink any alcohol before driving.
- (c) Do not exhaust yourself by driving long distances.

4. 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. It would be sensible to drink much less alcohol until you know what effect it has on you.

5. What about travel abroad?

You can travel abroad, but rules governing how much ketamine you can take with you vary according to the country you're visiting. Check with the Doctor/Specialist Palliative Care Nurse as soon as possible before you travel.

6. Can I stop the ketamine if my pain goes away?

If your pain disappears when taking ketamine, this may be due to the fact that it is doing its job. In this case, stopping ketamine suddenly may cause an increase in pain and other side-effects. Some people find that their pain responds well to just a couple of weeks' treatment with ketamine. In this situation, your Doctor may decide to stop the ketamine gradually.

- If you would like to reduce your dose or stop taking ketamine, please discuss it with your Doctor so that a gradual reduction in your dose can be undertaken.

7. Will I become addicted to ketamine?

No. There is no evidence that ketamine taken for pain causes addiction.

8. How/Where should I keep my ketamine?

Keep it somewhere safe at home, out of the reach of young children.

9. What if I forget to take a regular dose?

Talk to your Doctor or Specialist Palliative Care Nurse. If it is more than an hour since the dose was due, it is best to wait until the next regular dose is due.

10. What if I get more pain when taking ketamine?

Talk to your Hospice Doctor or Specialist Palliative Care Nurse. It may be that they need to adjust your dose of ketamine, or one of the other painkillers you are taking.

11. How will I know if I am taking too much ketamine?

Signs that may suggest you are taking too much ketamine include: feeling sleepier than usual, confusion, vivid dreams, hallucinations, visual disturbance, and nausea. If you notice these - or any other unusual symptoms - tell your Specialist Palliative Care Nurse or Doctor.



Willen Hospice Milton Road Willen Village
Milton Keynes MK15 9AB
Tel: 01908 663636 www.willen-hospice.org.uk



Willen Hospice
always there to care