

Client Handout

## What is ketamine?

Ketamine is a synthetic compound that has historically been used as an anesthetic and analgesic. It's very safe and has been used for decades in surgery, on the battlefield, and in animal hospitals. It has several different effects on the brain that also make it particularly useful for mental health treatment.

- Ketamine blocks NMDA receptors, leading to a surge of glutamate release. This causes rapid mood improvements by restoring glutamatergic signaling. Essentially, we're waking up dormant neurons so that they can communicate more freely. It's kind of like jump starting a car battery.
- Ketamine turns off "burst mode" in the lateral habenula (the "anti-reward" center in the brain). This makes it easier for you to approach and process negative emotions that have otherwise been too difficult for you to access. It's like extinguishing the fire of stress in your brain.
- Ketamine stimulates brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF), leading to the creation of new neurons and new connections between neurons. It's like a miracle-grow for your mind.
- Ketamine interrupts connection between the cerebral cortex and limbic system, causing a "time out" from regular thinking patterns that are keeping you stuck. It's like rebooting your brain computer!

## How does ketamine assist with psychotherapy?

Psychotherapy is designed to help you identify and transform self-defeating patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving. Sometimes these patterns are difficult to uncover, understand, and/or change. The ketamine experience helps you gain perspective and see these stuck patterns more clearly. Armed with this clearer perspective, you are better equipped to make the changes that have otherwise been difficult to make.

## What does being on ketamine feel like?

In addition to the helpful effects that ketamine has directly on the brain, it can also cause an altered state of consciousness. Many people find this altered state profound and transformational.

People often describe the ketamine experience as a "journey" or a "trip" filled with deep symbolism and meaning. The ketamine journey can be euphoric, intense, or even boring. Some people do not experience a journey at all and remember nothing after they come out of the medicine. Whatever your experience is like, trust that it is the experience you needed. You will not be alone, so if your journey becomes emotionally intense ask for support and our staff will comfort and reassure you.

### Common Experiences Include:

- Dreamlike visions
- Out-of-body sensation
- Lost or altered sense of time and space
- Altered sense of self ("ego dissolution")
- Sense of oneness with earth/universe/God
- Cathartic release of dammed up emotions
- Replaying of memories
- Detachment from hang-ups, insecurities, worries, etc.
- Enhanced trust in self

## Where will my treatment take place?

This will vary depending on which of our clinics you receive treatment. You will either be in a private room or in a group room. Talk to your provider if you have a preference. Regardless of which room you are in, you will be in a comfortable chair and will be provided a blanket, eyeshades, and headphones for music. You will be offered nausea medication and your vital signs (i.e., blood pressure, heart rate, O2 saturation) will be recorded. Depending on the route of administration you and your provider have agreed on, you will receive the medicine via an injection in the shoulder, IV drip, nasal spray, or lozenge that you hold under your tongue.

## A note about music

We will offer you a music player with carefully selected songs designed to facilitate a pleasant experience. Of course, you are welcome to use your own device and select your own music. We recommend songs without lyrics that are calming and relaxing. Ask your provider for specific playlist suggestions. If you use your smartphone, do not use a music service that will interrupt your experience with advertisements. Also, please disable notifications so that you don't receive texts, alerts, or phone calls during your experience.

## How should I prepare for my ketamine experience?

### Physical Preparation

- No food or drink 6 hours prior to ketamine session (*clear liquids are ok up until 2 hours before*)
- Hydrate well in the days leading up to the session.
- Prioritize good sleep in the days leading up to your session.
- Take prescribed medication in accordance with your doctor's instructions.
- Relax the body (stretching, hot bath, light exercise, deep breathing)

### Mental Preparation

- Set your intentions (more on that below)
- Limit stressful stimuli
- Reduce your media diet (news, social media) to only uplifting content
- Seek solitude if you need it
- Seek supportive social contact
- Spend time in nature
- Play with pets
- Mediate
- Pray
- Journal

### Logistical preparation

- Arrange for a ride home
- Wear comfortable clothing
- Clear your schedule for the day to recuperate
- Bring water bottle
- Bring comfort object/your own blanket if desired

## How to set intentions

Your mindset going into the ketamine journey can influence what you get out of it. You can optimize your mindset by setting intentions for your experience. Here are some suggestions for cultivating a therapeutic mindset.

Ask yourself:

- What are you seeking to transform?
- What are you seeking to heal?
- What are you seeking to understand?
- What are you seeking to change?

Once you have contemplated answers to those questions, use the following formula to craft a memorable intention for your ketamine journey:

*First choose one of the following verbs:*

- Help me with...
- Teach me about...
- Show me...

*Combine it with:*

- A difficult emotion (fear, anger, guilt, sadness, shame, joy)
- OR an essential quality (peace, love, compassion, connection)

Examples

- Show me...my fear
- Teach me...about love
- Help me...experience joy

Write your intention down here:

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Keep your intention in mind as you enter your ketamine journey. However, it is not crucial that you “hold on” to your intention as the journey starts. Sometimes ketamine has its own agenda. When in doubt, surrender, let go, and be curious.

## **Tips on navigating the ketamine experience**

With your intention in mind, you are ready to embark on your ketamine journey. Soon after receiving the medicine, you will experience a change in sensation and perception. Lean in and surrender to whatever shows up. If you see doors, open them. If you see staircases, go up them. If you see bodies of water, go into them. Say yes to everything.

When feeling discomfort, including fear or confusion, again - meet the experience with curiosity. Avoid the urge to resist, evade, stop, or control the experience. Part of healing comes from approaching that which is uncomfortable and creating a new experience with it.

You may have a deep and transcendental experience. Your sense of self may dissolve, leading to the sensation of death and/or rebirth. You may experience a feeling that you have ceased to exist as an individual and are connected with nature, God, or the universe. Whether you feel like dying, melting, dissolving, exploding, going crazy, or just floating in outer space -- go right ahead. Experience the experience.

Remember that the breath is a powerful tool. It can deepen the experience and help you move through anything that feels challenging. Ketamine does not suppress respiration, but sometimes it can feel like your lungs aren't working quite right. Take slow, deliberate breaths if you feel overwhelmed or distressed.

## So I've had my ketamine experience. Now what?

You may feel light-headed, dizzy, tired, or relaxed. It may be difficult for you to gather your thoughts for a few hours, so be gentle with yourself. Here are some things you can do in the hours following your experience:

- Record as much as you can remember from your experience (journal, voice memo, talk-to-text)
- Rest your body and mind. Sleep if you need to.
- Your mind will be open and sensitive. Be selective about who you are with and what kind of media you consume.
- If you feel up to it, go for a walk in nature and contemplate the experience.

In the days and weeks following your ketamine experience, it is crucial that you work with a therapist and/or on your own to integrate any insights gained from the experience into your daily life.

## How do I integrate my ketamine experience into my daily life?

While the ketamine experience can be transformational, the real "transforming" is up to you. We call this transformational process "integration." Ideally, you will work with a therapist who will help you with integration. Regardless, here are a few integration strategies you can use to get the most out of your ketamine treatment:

- **Listen to your body.** Ask yourself on a daily basis: "What is the most loving thing I can do for myself today?" or "What does my body need right now?" Let your body provide you with that answer. You may discover that you need physical rest, nourishment, or even hydration. Act from that wisdom.
- **Tend to your body.** Go for a massage, practice a martial art, engage in yoga, or a somatic form of mindfulness. There is a growing body of research relating to the mental & physical benefits of increasing the connection to one's body.
- **Meditate.** The benefits of meditation are well documented and include enhanced physical functioning, improved capacity to regulate one's emotions, and even relapse prevention. Mindfulness (observing the mind) and forms of meditation (Vipassana, Zen, The Presence Process, etc.) are all good options. Find the fit that is right for you.
- **Practice gratitude.** Make a daily list of people and things for which you are grateful. Not only does the practice of gratitude act as an antidepressant, it increases access to positive memories, among other positive outcomes, even if rote.
- **Journal.** Write about your ketamine experience, including insights, thoughts, emotions and sensations in the body. Consider an ongoing practice of journaling post-treatment and reread your journal to stay connected to the teachings.
- **Recall "positive" or meaningful ketamine experiences.** Take some time to remember those moments that were especially joyous or peaceful. Invite those experiences into your body and let them ground you in the here and now.
- **Get creative.** Write, draw, paint, dance, or sculpt; even if you believe you have zero artistic training or perceived ability. Creative activities activate different parts of the brain and can have a healing and protective effect on mental well-being. They can also reduce blood pressure, and even boost the immune system.
- **Spend time in nature.** Purposefully reflect on your experiences and feelings. Mindfully sit on the earth or feel your feet on the ground. Take advantage of the direct and positive impacts of nature on well-being.
- **Cultivate your spirituality.** Religious and spiritual practices are positively related to mental and physical health. You don't need to be clear about your religious or spiritual identity to ask for external support, guidance, and reassurance that life is unfolding as it should. Pray to God, to Creator, light, your higher self, etc. Cultivate the divine within.