



Ketamine Infusion – patient information

What is ketamine?

Ketamine is a drug that when used in high doses acts as an anaesthetic agent. It is most commonly utilised during short operations involving children. In low doses it has been found to be an effective treatment for persistent pain which has not responded to standard treatment. Ketamine works by changing the way pain messages are sent from the area of pain to the brain. In particular, it has been shown to be a helpful treatment for nerve pain (neuropathic pain) and can be particularly beneficial in central sensitisation and fibromyalgia (where pain is felt in multiple areas of the body).

Receiving a ketamine infusion

As you are required to be strictly monitored while receiving a Ketamine infusion, it is administered while you are an inpatient in the Cardiac Stepdown Unit (CSU) at Ashford Hospital. This allows nursing staff to closely observe you and record your blood pressure, heart rate and sedation level and report any side effects to Dr Green. You will also be asked to regularly rate your pain level on a scale of 0-10.

You will be admitted for 2-4 days and will remain in CSU for the duration of the infusion. Patients are not permitted to leave the ward while they are receiving a Ketamine infusion unless it is for an investigation ordered by Dr Green and they are escorted by a nurse.

On admission to CSU, Dr Green will insert an intravenous cannula into the back of your hand or in your arm. The Ketamine infusion will then be connected and a starting (bolus) dose of Ketamine will be given (this is because Ketamine needs to reach a therapeutic level in the body to begin to take effect).

Side effects of a ketamine infusion

It is common to feel a floating feeling or a sense of unreality during the administration of a Ketamine infusion. It may also make you feel more tired or drowsy. Patients often find it best to rest for the duration of the infusion.

Some people will experience side effects while they are receiving the Ketamine infusion. These may include vivid dreams, nightmares, hallucinations, mood swings or agitation. Often these side effects will occur when the Ketamine infusion is first commenced or when there is an increase in the dose. These side effects can often be controlled by reducing the dose of Ketamine or stopping the infusion for a period of time and recommencing the Ketamine at a lower dose.



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Ketamine may also increase your blood pressure and heart rate and nursing staff will closely monitor these particularly in the first 24 hours of the infusion. Ketamine may also make some people feel nauseated or vomit. If you feel nauseous please inform the nursing staff who can administer medication to help with these symptoms.

Following a ketamine infusion

While you are in hospital receiving the Ketamine infusion your level of pain will be closely monitored and recorded by the nursing staff. It is hoped that the Ketamine will help to reduce your pain.

The expectation is that the Ketamine infusion will change the way pain messages are communicated in your body and will continue to help with your pain once you are discharged from hospital. If your pain is helped by the Ketamine infusion it is a treatment that can be repeated at set intervals depending on your individual response to the infusion with the anticipation that as your pain level reduces the need for repeat Ketamine infusions will also decrease.