

Ketamine. What Every Parent Needs to Know.

The drug epidemic stealing our young people — and what you can do about it.

Ketamine has become the silent epidemic of our generation — and the number of young people affected across the UK has reached crisis point.

As a parent, I didn't know either — until it was too late. Ketamine is being sold through the same apps our children use every day, at parties and gatherings, reaching children as young as 14. Most parents have no idea it's even happening, let alone what to look for. This is what you need to know.

What is ketamine?

- A Class B controlled drug — illegal, but treated less seriously than Class A. Lighter sentences mean dealers push it freely with less fear of consequence.
- A powerful dissociative that distorts perception. With prolonged use, it damages the areas of the brain responsible for decision making and memory — particularly in young people, whose brains are still developing. Bladder damage is often permanent. Cognitive effects may persist long after stopping.
- Predominantly sold as a white powder, ingested through the nose (sniffing). Very cheap to buy and the effects only last a short time — making it easy to hide. Street names: Ket, K, Special K.
- The risk of psychological addiction is severe and often underestimated — comparable to some Class A drugs. You may find information online suggesting otherwise. Do not be reassured by this.

Physical signs

- Frequently needing the toilet, pain or burning when urinating, blood in urine — can easily be mistaken for a standard urinary infection.
- Severe stomach pain ("K-cramps") — often misdiagnosed as appendicitis, and in females can also go hidden as severe menstrual pain.
- Unexplained weight loss — ketamine suppresses appetite and the stomach pain it causes makes eating extremely uncomfortable.
- Withdrawal from family and friends.
- Dramatic mood swings or increased secrecy.

Behavioural signs

- Memory problems, confusion, poor concentration, erratic behaviour.
- Finding white powder, small plastic bags varying in size, or folded paper wraps.
- Spending unexplained amounts of money — often lots of small transactions. These can appear on bank statements masked as other things, such as 'clothing'.
- New friendships you know nothing about.
- Red, watery eyes; appearing "zoned out" or disconnected. Slow, slurred speech. Sleeping continuously or very difficult to rouse.

What to do if you suspect your child is using ketamine

- **Choose a calm moment** — not in the middle of an argument.
- **Lead with love, not accusation:** "I've noticed some changes and I'm worried about you."
- **Listen more than you speak.** Your child needs to feel heard, not judged.
- **Share Honor's story** — sometimes a real story stops a young person in their tracks in a way that nothing else can. Read it at h23foundation.org/honors-story
- **Avoid ultimatums in the first conversation.** Keep the door open — but be clear that you know what's going on. Young people often believe they have it under control. Calmly let them know you know otherwise.
- **If they deny it,** say "I just want you to know I'm here whenever you're ready to talk — you're not in trouble, I just love you and I'm worried." Reassure them they won't be told off.
- **Seek professional help early — do not wait for rock bottom.** See the resources below for where to start.

Where to get help

- **Home drug testing kits:** Urine tests are available online — check they cover ketamine specifically as many don't. Look for **KET** in the product description.
- **FRANK:** Free, confidential, 24/7. Call **0300 123 6600** or visit talktofrank.com
- **Your GP:** Book an appointment urgently. Ask about supervised withdrawal support and a referral to your local Community Drug & Alcohol Team (CDAT). This may feel extreme, but it can be crucial. Private treatment is also an option. For full guidance visit h23foundation.org
- **H23 Foundation:** Full guidance, local support directory, peer support for parents, and links to services including free drug & alcohol teams near you — h23foundation.org

If you think your child needs urgent help

- **Bladder symptoms are a medical emergency** — do not wait. Go to A&E; or call your GP.
- **If they are unconscious, fitting, or won't respond: call 999 immediately.** Stay with them — you will not get them in trouble by calling for help.
- **Samaritans:** Severe ketamine use is closely linked to depression and suicidal thoughts. If you are worried about your child's mental state, call **116 123** (free, 24/7) or visit samaritans.org