



**East Cheshire
Hospice**

Where people come to live

Ketamine for Pain Control in Palliative care:

A Guide for Patients



Introduction

This leaflet provides information on a medicine called ketamine, which can be used to treat pain that is difficult to control. It is offered as a guide to you and your family. However, the possible effects of treatment will vary from person to person; your doctor, nurse or pharmacist will be happy to answer any questions you have about your individual treatment plan

What is ketamine?

Ketamine is a medicine that was first used as an anaesthetic to help put people to sleep before an operation. It has also been used at much lower doses to help ease certain types of severe pain such as neuropathic (nerve) pain, bone pain, or pain related to burns. It is usually prescribed when other types of pain killers such as opioids (e.g. morphine) have not been as effective as required. It may be prescribed by itself, or in combination with other pain killers. It is always started by a doctor who specialises in treating pain. Although ketamine is not licensed to treat pain, it has been used for many years to treat pain and doctors who specialise in pain control have a lot of experience using this medicine. Ketamine is available as an oral liquid, and as an injection that can be given under the skin.

How does ketamine work?

Ketamine works mainly by blocking the action of a certain chemical (N-methyl-D-aspartate) in the spinal cord that sends messages to the brain that tells it you are feeling pain.

How is ketamine usually prescribed?

Your doctor will usually ask you to come into the Hospice to stay overnight for the first few days of treatment. This is in order for your doctor to find the right dose of medicine for you and to monitor your response to treatment. Your doctor will usually start off by prescribing a low dose of ketamine and then slowly increase it. This is because like any medicine ketamine has a number of side-effects. Starting off with a low dose and slowly increasing it allows your body to get used to these effects. It also allows your doctor to see how well your symptoms are responding to ketamine. How much ketamine you will need depends upon how well it is working for you and if you are having any side-effects. When you are discharged from the Hospice you will receive a supply of ketamine from the pharmacy. An appointment will be made for you to see a specialist doctor in clinic for review and to prescribe more medicine if needed. Ketamine can only be obtained through the Hospice/hospital pharmacy and must be ordered in advance. If you are running out of supply, please contact the Macmillan pharmacist or the hospital pharmacy at least 48 hours before your current supply is finished. It usually takes a minimum of 24 hours to order the ketamine for you.

What should I do if I miss a dose?

If you miss a dose try to take it as soon as you remember. However if it is almost time for your next usual dose, wait until then to take your medicine and skip the missed dose. If you are sick within one hour of taking a dose of ketamine repeat the dose as soon as you feel better. If you miss more than one dose through being unwell,

contact your doctor. Never double up the dose to make up for a missed dose.

How well or quickly does ketamine work?

For some people ketamine can work very quickly (within a few hours). For other people it may take a few weeks of taking the maximum dose of ketamine before their pain will improve. It is not possible to tell who will respond quickly to ketamine.

Can I take other medicines if I take ketamine?

In general, ketamine should not affect your other medicines. When you start ketamine you will be staying in the Hospice and your doctor or pharmacist will make sure that you are not given ketamine with other medicines that may not be suitable. Other painkillers such as weak opioids (e.g. codeine), non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as ibuprofen, or paracetamol can be taken at the same time as ketamine/If you are already taking a strong opioid such as morphine, and you are started on ketamine your doctor will usually reduce the dose of your morphine. This is because you may not need the same amount of strong opioid while taking ketamine. Before you take or buy any new medicines always tell your doctor or pharmacist that you are taking ketamine.

What is the length of treatment?

The length of treatment will depend on why you were started on ketamine and how well it works.

Ketamine can continue to work for pain even after it has been stopped. For example, once your pain is under control for a few weeks your doctor may decide to slowly stop the treatment.

Is ketamine addictive?

It is very rare for someone who is taking ketamine for pain relief to become addicted to ketamine. However it is sometimes taken illegally in large doses and when used in this way there can be problems with addiction. If you need to stop taking ketamine it should be stopped slowly by your doctor, because stopping suddenly can result in severe rebound pain. This is when pain comes back quickly and can be severe.

What are the possible side-effects?

Tiredness or sleepiness may occur for a short period of time after taking the prescribed dose. You may also experience a sensation that everything feels "unreal" or "far away" - this will last for only a short time.

Other common side-effects include:

- Drowsiness
- Vivid dreams
- Hallucinations
- Dysphoria (feeling unwell or unhappy).

These symptoms can also be signs that your dose of ketamine is too high.

Less commonly reported side-effects include an increase in blood pressure, and a fast heart rate. Rarely, ketamine can affect how well your liver works. Your doctor will monitor your liver function with blood tests. For the vast

majority of people, their liver function returns to normal once ketamine has been stopped.

More recently there have been reports of ketamine causing problems with the urinary tract (the system that passes urine out of your body). These problems include pain passing water, blood in the urine, and needing to pass urine more often. Please contact your GP or your specialist nurse or doctor if you experience any of these symptoms.

Who cannot take ketamine?

Normally you should not take ketamine if you have:

- Raised pressure within the skull (your doctor will know if this is the case)
- Severe high blood pressure
- Raised pressure inside the eye (glaucoma)
- Recent history of epilepsy
- Recent history of psychosis.

Do I need to have any tests when taking ketamine?

While you are taking ketamine you will need to have regular blood tests to monitor your liver and you will also need to have your blood pressure taken regularly. In addition you will also be monitored for problems with your urinary tract. Your doctor or nurse will ask you if you have any problem such as stinging when you pass water, if you are passing water more often than normal and if you have any blood in the urine.

Can I drink alcohol?

If possible, you should avoid drinking alcohol if you are taking ketamine. This is because alcohol may increase some of the side-effects of ketamine.

Can I drive?

Taking ketamine does not automatically mean that you cannot drive. People who take the same amount of ketamine every day for pain are usually fit to drive. When you first start taking ketamine or when your dose is increased you may feel drowsy. You should use common sense and not drive if you feel drowsy.

Note: Your doctor may have told you that you are fit to drive, but remember it is your responsibility to decide whether you are fit to drive on each occasion.

Useful contact numbers:

East Cheshire Hospice 24hr Advice line	01625 666999
Hospital Specialist Palliative Care Team (9am-5pm, Mon to Fri)	01625 663177

GP.....
GP Out of hours.....
District nurses.....
Other.....

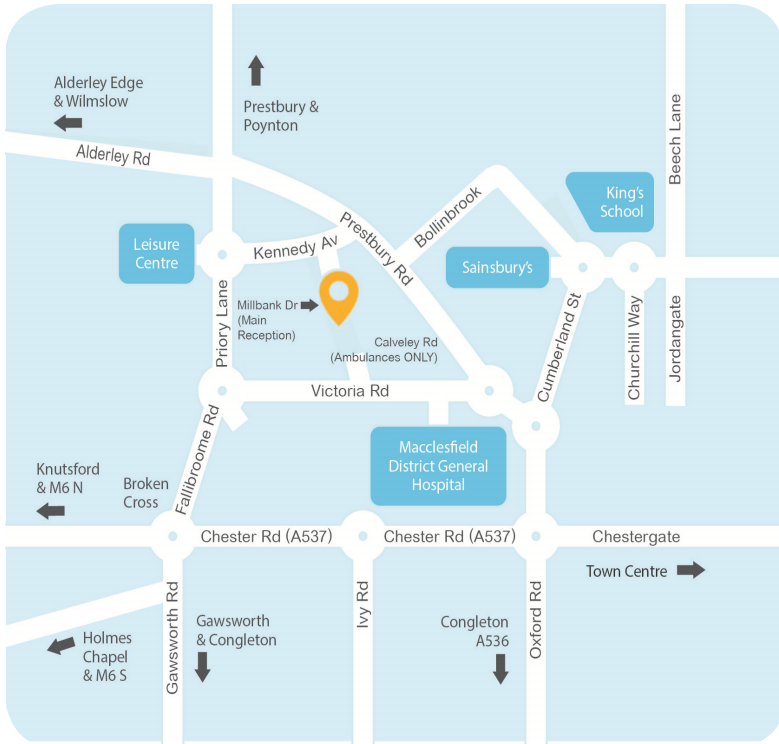
Macclesfield District General Hospital Pharmacy
01625 663833

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