



An Introduction to Ketamine-Assisted Psychotherapy

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Ketamine-Assisted Psychotherapy (KAP) combines the use of ketamine, a dissociative anesthetic, with psychotherapy to support emotional healing and psychological well-being. The medicinal properties of ketamine can provide rapid relief from symptoms of depression and anxiety, enhance neuroplasticity, and facilitate shifts in consciousness that can help individuals access deeper levels of mind, emotion, and memory. The use of ketamine—especially when integrated with well-focused, skillful psychotherapy—creates a powerful opportunity for deep inner work.

Who Can Benefit from KAP?

Initial research suggests that KAP may be particularly suited for individuals with treatment-resistant depression, anxiety, or PTSD, with early studies showing positive and lasting outcomes when ketamine is combined with psychotherapy (Dore et al., 2019; Kew et al., 2023).

It may also be helpful for those who:

- Feel stuck in patterns of thought or behavior that have proven hard to change through traditional therapy
- Experience chronic stress or burnout
- Face addiction, chronic pain, or unresolved grief
- Desire deeper self-awareness and emotional exploration

What is Ketamine?

First synthesized in 1962 and approved by the FDA in 1970 for use as an anesthetic, ketamine has a decades-long track record of safe use in medical settings worldwide. Ketamine has been used off-label in sub-anesthetic doses as an analgesic (pain reliever) and, more recently, has gained recognition for its potent effects in treating mental health conditions such as anxiety, depression, and PTSD.

Unlike conventional antidepressants, which typically take weeks or months to yield results, ketamine has been found to alleviate symptoms of depression and anxiety rapidly, often within hours. It works differently than typical antidepressants, in part, by acting on the brain's glutamate system and boosting neuroplasticity, which enhances the brain's flexibility and capacity for change. In addition, ketamine has the unique ability to create an altered state of consciousness, in which individuals may experience a sense of expansive detachment from their usual patterns of thought and emotion. This shift in perspective can support deeper exploration of challenging inner psychological landscapes, including trauma.

How is Ketamine Administered?

As a KAP psychotherapist, I specialize in guiding clients through a therapeutic journey (discussed below) that utilizes ketamine. However, I am not a medical doctor, so I do not prescribe, distribute, store, or administer ketamine. Therefore, clients obtain their ketamine prescription through a prescriber (e.g., psychiatrist or psychiatric nurse). The prescriber screens for medical appropriateness and typically arranges for ketamine to be mailed to the client's home from a specialized compounding pharmacy. Prescribed ketamine is usually in a form called a rapid dissolving tablet (RDT). At a certain point during the ketamine session, the client self-administers ketamine per their prescriber's instructions. The tablet(s) are placed in the mouth, where they quickly dissolve, and the resulting medicine/saliva blend is held for several minutes to facilitate absorption into the oral mucosa (the lining in the mouth). After a designated period of time, the ketamine is spit out into a cup. At this time, the effects of the medicine will likely be felt. I will be there throughout the session to offer guidance and support as the process unfolds.

What is the KAP Process?

KAP is carefully designed to facilitate a unique journey of healing and self-discovery. The process is divided into three essential phases: preparation, the ketamine session (also called "medicine," "dosing," or "exploration" session), and integration. Each step plays a critical role in supporting a safe, meaningful, and transformative experience.

Preparation: Establishing the Foundation for Healing

The preparation phase is the foundation of the KAP journey. I meet with new clients for three or more sessions to discuss their personal history, current challenges, and goals for treatment. These sessions help us build a sense of familiarity and trust and are aimed at preparing clients mentally and emotionally for the ketamine dosing session. During preparation, I thoroughly describe the logistics and flow of the upcoming ketamine exploration sessions, so clients have

a good idea of what to expect. I also support clients in establishing clear intentions, which can contribute to a more impactful ketamine experience. The fundamental goal of preparation is for clients to feel both supported and empowered as we enter into the medicine/exploration sessions.

Ketamine Session: Facilitating Inner Exploration

On the day of ketamine dosing sessions, clients bring the ketamine tablets prescribed to them to my office. Clients spend time settling in, making themselves comfortable (on a couch or recliner with sheets, blanket, and pillows). They then spend time connecting to their intention for the session. When ready, the client self-administers the ketamine per their prescriber's instructions. The inward exploration is supported by an eye mask to create darkness (if desired) and instrumental music played through headphones, specifically selected to help carry clients through ketamine journeys.

As the ketamine takes effect, individuals typically enter an altered state of consciousness, which often includes a feeling of expanded awareness and/or detachment from their usual thoughts, body sensations, and sense of self. In this state, habitual mental barriers and defenses may relax, opening doors to new ways of processing old wounds, limiting beliefs, or other challenges. From the perspective afforded by the non-ordinary state of consciousness, meaningful insights and emotional breakthroughs often emerge.

Throughout the session, I am present to provide support and guidance when needed, while also allowing space for the inner process to unfold naturally. The acute effects of sublingual ketamine typically last 45–60 minutes. As the effects wear off, clients will have time to slowly transition back to normal awareness. At this point, clients will sometimes want to talk about their experience. Other times, they may prefer silence. They might be inspired to draw or take some notes about their exploration. They might want to drink water or another beverage, and have a light snack.

Ketamine exploration sessions usually range in length from 2 to 2.5 hours, but I schedule 3 hours so there is plenty of time. Sometimes emotionally challenging material surfaces in ketamine sessions. When this occurs, I am present and bring years of experience helping clients ride the waves of strong emotions and find grounding, resolve difficult material, and discover meaning in their experiences.

Other times, ketamine catalyzes profound feelings of interconnection, unity, awe, or gratitude—even reverence—for the preciousness of life. These kinds of experiences are sometimes described as mystical or spiritual, and may have therapeutic relevance, particularly when they help individuals connect with meaning, values, or a broader sense of self.

Integration: Transforming Insights into Lasting Change

Integration is perhaps the most important part of the KAP process. It involves making sense of the ketamine experience and incorporating the insights and inspirations that arise from it into everyday life. Integration sessions may involve processing any challenging experiences that surfaced during the exploration session, reevaluating old patterns, internalizing new understandings, and setting intentions for specific behavioral change.

As the effects of the medication begin to wear off, the process of integration naturally begins. There will be some time for integration toward the end of the ketamine session, but I also hold integration sessions with clients within a couple of days after each dosing session. And, of course, clients do their own integration work in between sessions. Integration supports clients in turning their often profound, and occasionally abstract, experiences into practical changes in their day-to-day life. The overarching goal of integration is to turn experiences that could otherwise be fleeting into lasting transformations.

What is a Full Course of KAP?

For new clients, I hold at least three preparation sessions, but sometimes four or more are helpful. After the prep sessions, we begin ketamine dosing sessions. For each dosing session, I schedule at least one integration session, ideally within 1–3 days afterward. Sometimes dosing sessions bring up a lot of material to integrate, and two or more integration sessions may be desired before engaging in another dosing session. The parameters of ketamine session frequency are set by client prescribers, but I typically recommend one dosing session every two weeks to provide plenty of time for integration.

Clinical evidence suggests that 8–10 ketamine sessions are usually sufficient to support meaningful change for most people. We'll reflect together—alongside your prescriber—on treatment effectiveness and when a natural stopping point arises. That said, clients can choose to discontinue treatment at any time.

Next Steps

Feel free to reach out by phone or email. If I have space in my practice, we can schedule a complimentary 20 minute phone call to discuss your interest in KAP, answer any initial questions, and explore whether this approach feels like a good fit.

References

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