KETAMINE FOR DEPRESSION

What is Ketamine?

Ketamine was first synthesized in 1962 and received FDA approval in 1970 for use as an anesthetic for general anesthesia induction and maintenance. It is classified by the DEA as a schedule 3 controlled substance. It is also used off-label for the treatment of chronic pain conditions such as fibromyalgia and complex regional pain syndrome (CRPS). More recently there is a growing body of evidence demonstrating that ketamine can be effectively used to achieve rapid relief of depression symptoms. Multiple studies over the last decade have shown that ketamine can rapidly alleviate symptoms of treatment resistant depression, within hours of treatment. (References below)

This “off-label” psychiatric use appears to offer several advantages over traditional antidepressant therapy. Rapid response is the primary benefit. Depression can improve within hours, compared to 4-6 weeks for a trial of antidepressants. Additionally, ketamine does not cause the usual side effects associated with most current antidepressants, nor does it cause weight gain. The medication is so promising (70% rapid response rate in most studies) and it is so different from existing antidepressants, that it can now be offered to carefully selected patients in an office setting.

What are the side effects?

Ketamine is a “fast-in, fast-out” drug that can be given as an injection in the arm or hip muscle with 90% absorption and elimination in 4-6 hours, or by monitored IV infusion, 100% absorption and elimination in minutes. The side effects are rare but include allergic reaction, elevation of blood pressure, and a weird “spaced out” dreamy state that quickly wears off. These risks require a sitter or companion to drive the patient home and remain nearby for 12-24 hours. Normal activities can be resumed the next day.

What are the benefits?

Rapid response is the primary benefit. Depression can improve within hours, compared to 4-6 weeks for a trial of antidepressants. Unlike most antidepressants, Ketamine does not cause sexual side effects or weight gain. When starting ketamine, it is not necessary to stop your current medication, however; after demonstrating a positive response, patients may be able to gradually wean off of their other depression medication under the careful supervision of the psychiatrist. It is thought that a series of several treatments over several weeks or months can result in more long-lasting improvement. If there is no change after the second treatment, the patient may be in the 20-30% non-responder group and there is no need to continue.
What is the cost?
All patients must first undergo a psychiatric assessment by the doctor ($400, applies only to new patients and can be billed to insurance). Dr. Weinstock will perform the Ketamine injection at the same time as your regular appointment. You are responsible for paying your normal insurance copay for the office visit plus an additional $175 for the Ketamine treatment because Ketamine therapy is not a covered service by insurance. The additional $175 charge may be covered by a medical savings plan or health savings account. A course of four to six injections, given every 1 - 3 weeks is usually recommended. Injections are administered by the doctor in the arm or hip muscle and require monitoring of mental status and blood pressure for 30-45 minutes before going home with your companion. The doctor may also give you a prescription for daily sublingual (under the tongue) ketamine tablets to extend the beneficial effects of the injection. This prescription can be filled at most compounding pharmacies and usually costs around $50 per month. Using the sublingual tablets is optional and can usually help extend the time between injections, but it is not required.

How do I get started?
Call or email our office to schedule a new patient visit to determine if ketamine is right for you.
Office phone: 813-636-8300
Office email: floridamentalhealth@gmail.com

References:
From the U.S. Psychiatric and Mental Health Congress:
Novel Therapeutics for Major Depression

Journal Article References:
Rapid and longer-term antidepressant effects of repeated ketamine infusions in treatment-resistant major depression.
Ketamine's antidepressant effect: focus on ketamine mechanisms of action
The role of ketamine in treatment-resistant depression: a systematic review.
Effects of intravenous ketamine on explicit and implicit measures of suicidality in treatment-resistant depression.
Antidepressant mechanism of ketamine: perspective from preclinical studies.
Acute Antidepressant Effects of Intramuscular Versus Intravenous Ketamine