KETAMINE FOR DEPRESSION

What is Ketamine?

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 anti-depressants, that it can now be offered to carefully selected patients in an office setting.

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).

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 after the first treatment. Depending on individual doses and responses, it may be possible for patients to drive themselves home 1 hour after follow-up treatments, if approved and cleared by Dr. Weinstock.

What are the benefits?

Rapid response is the primary benefit. Depression can improve within hours, compared to 4-6 weeks for a trial of anti-depressants. Unlike most anti-depressants, 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 Dr. Weinstock. It is thought that a series of several treatments over several weeks or months can result in more long-lasting improvement.
What is the cost?

All patients must first undergo a psychiatric assessment and evaluation ($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 co-pay for the office visit plus an additional $175 for the ketamine treatment because ketamine therapy is not a covered service by insurance. You may use a health savings account or flexible savings account to pay for the treatment.

An initial series of 2 – 4 weekly injections is usually recommended. Injections are administered by Dr. Weinstock 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.

Dr. Weinstock 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