

PSYCHEDELIC RESEARCH SNAPSHOT

# EXPLORING KETAMINE- ASSISTED COUPLES THERAPY



**MAPS**  
CANADA 

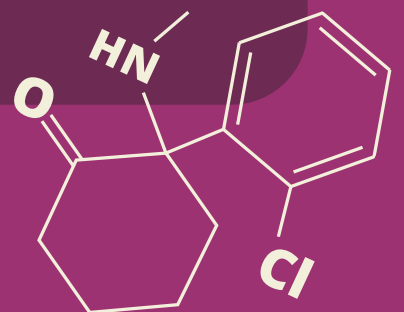
# KETAMINE EXPLAINED

Ketamine is an **approved anaesthetic** for human and veterinary medicine.

Ketamine works by **blocking** a receptor in the brain called the **NMDA receptor**.

When this receptor is **blocked**, the brain responds by releasing **more glutamate**, which then triggers a series of changes.

One key effect is the promotion of **neuroplasticity**, the brain's ability to form **new** neural connections.



**MAPS**  
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# THERAPEUTIC USES

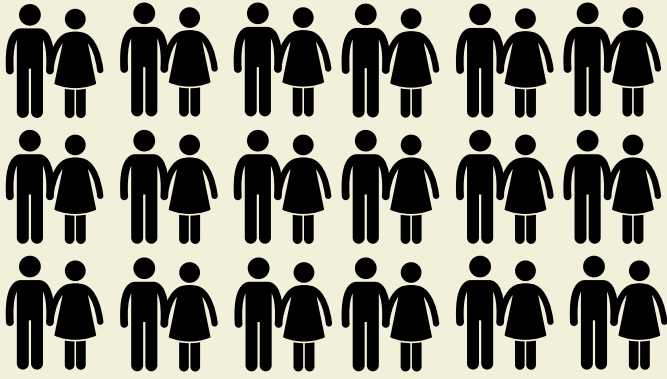
At **below** anaesthetic doses, ketamine can lead to a feeling of **detachment** from the body, a sensation sometimes described as **‘bodily transcendence’**.

Such ketamine doses can result in feelings **commonly** associated with **psychedelics** (ex. unity, transcendence, empathy and expanded consciousness).



Possible negative side effects include nausea, confusion, vomiting and dysphoria (i.e., unease, unhappiness, distress).

# WHO?



18 Couples who previously completed Imago Relationship Therapy (IRT) workshops

# WHAT?

Couples completed 4 weekly sessions combining “relational doses” of ketamine with IRT, a structured therapy centred on empathy, mutual understanding, and early relational experiences

# HOW?

“Relational doses” were individually determined based on an amount that provoked an “inward journey” while still allowing individuals to resist and actively interact with their partner

Primary doses were given via lozenges

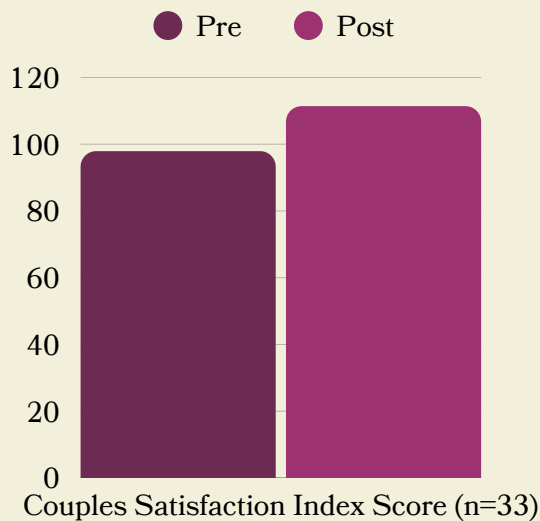
# WHY?

To report on the safety and effectiveness of relational doses of ketamine alongside IRT in a clinically controlled setting

# RESULTS

Couples reported significantly **higher** relationship **satisfaction** by the end of treatment and into follow-up.

Couples described several **common** effects of ketamine, including easier conversation, more **insight**, increased **empathy**, **psychedelic** or **spiritual** experiences, **better mood**, **less fear**, and feeling **less defensive**.



**Increased Empathy**  
“Our minds knew it but the ketamine helped out hearts to know it... I felt it in my chest – good”

**Lowered Defences**  
“Free of defenses almost right away – made me see how much I react usually”

# TAKEAWAYS

Although the sample was small, the study suggests that combining **relational doses of ketamine with Imago Relationship Therapy (IRT)** may help **improve relationship satisfaction**.

In particular, relational doses seem to **enhance** the therapeutic experience by **increasing** feelings of **safety, connection,** and **empathy**, which in turn **deepens vulnerability** and **accelerates** progress.

While these results are **promising**, studies with **larger** and **more diverse** samples are still needed.



**MAPS**  
CANADA

# REFERENCE

## Exploring effects and experiences of ketamine in group couples therapy.

Cornfield, M., McBride, S., La Torre, J. T., Zalewa, D., Gallo, J., Mahammadli, M., & Williams, M. T. (2024).

*Journal of Psychedelic Studies*, 8(2), 233–247.

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