

KETAMINE AND OPIOIDS

Mixing ketamine with opioids—*especially unknowingly with potent synthetic opioids like fentanyl or nitazenes*—can be extremely dangerous and potentially fatal. This risk is growing due to contaminated drug supplies where users may not realise they're consuming opioids at all.

1. Brain & Neurological Effects

Ketamine + Opioids (Fentanyl, Heroin, Nitazenes)

- ❑ **Severe CNS depression:** Opioids suppress the brain's ability to regulate breathing and consciousness. Ketamine adds a dissociative effect that can mask overdose symptoms, making it harder to get help in time.
- ❑ **Rapid sedation and unconsciousness:** Nitazenes and fentanyl can cause a sudden loss of consciousness. With ketamine in the mix, a user may become non-responsive much faster than expected.
- ❑ **Confusion and hallucinations:** Ketamine may distort perception, while opioids can cause sedation or dream-like states. The combination increases the risk of delirium, paranoia, or severe mental health episodes.
- ❑ **Increased overdose risk:** Users who aren't opioid-tolerant are extremely vulnerable to even microgram quantities of fentanyl or nitazenes.

For Young People

- ❑ The developing brain is highly sensitive to respiratory depressants and neurotoxins.
- ❑ Early exposure to potent opioids can cause long-term alterations to pain pathways, emotional regulation, and reward systems, increasing the likelihood of chronic dependence or trauma-related disorders.

2. Body & Physical Health Effects

Acute Physical Risks

- ❑ **Respiratory failure:** Opioids suppress the breathing reflex. Ketamine may make it harder to notice this happening or delay response from peers because the person may appear to be in a "K-hole" or just asleep.
- ❑ **Unconscious vomiting and choking:** Both substances suppress the gag reflex. If a person vomits while unconscious, it can lead to aspiration and death.
- ❑ **Cardiovascular stress:** Opioids slow the heart, while ketamine can cause erratic heart rhythms. Together, they can destabilise the cardiovascular system and trigger cardiac arrest.
- ❑ **Risk of hypoxia:** Decreased breathing = reduced oxygen to the brain, which can cause brain damage, coma, or death even if reversed later with naloxone.

3. Hidden Risks – Unintentional Opioid Use

- ❑ **Fentanyl/nitazenes contamination:** Some people using ketamine (especially in powder or pill form) don't realise it's been cut with opioids. Even a trace amount of fentanyl or nitazenes can cause:
 - *Instant overdose, especially in non-tolerant users*
 - *No time to react – fentanyl can take effect in seconds*
 - *Naloxone-resistant overdose in the case of nitazenes (may require multiple doses or advanced medical care)*
- ❑ **No visible signs:** The effects of ketamine (e.g., sedation, inability to speak, collapse) may mask signs of an opioid overdose, delaying help.

Considerations for Young People or Inexperienced Users

- ❑ Young users may not test substances, rely on peers, or assume safety based on past experiences.
- ❑ Ketamine users may not be opioid-aware or trained in using naloxone.
- ❑ Teenagers or young adults may attribute overdose signs to “just a strong K-hole” or intoxication and not intervene in time.
- ❑ Peer environments (e.g., parties, raves) may lack access to naloxone, increasing the risk of fatality before emergency services arrive.

Summary of Risks by System

System	Ketamine + Opioids (including fentanyl/nitazenes)
Brain	Respiratory suppression, unconsciousness, cognitive shutdown
Breathing	Risk of rapid overdose, especially if unaware of opioid presence
Heart	Irregular heart rhythms, cardiac arrest
Mental Health	Confusion, hallucinations, dissociation, panic
Young People	Low tolerance to opioids, brain development risks, overdose vulnerability
Hidden Dangers	Unintentional opioid ingestion, naloxone resistance (with nitazenes)

What Increases Risk?

- ❑ *Not testing ketamine for opioid contamination (especially when local intelligence suggest it is in local supplies)*
- ❑ *No access to or awareness of naloxone (Nyxoid, Prenoxad)*
- ❑ *Using alone or in unsafe environments*
- ❑ *Assuming symptoms are just ketamine effects*
- ❑ *Using in high doses or combining with other depressants (alcohol, benzos)*

The greatest danger with ketamine-opioid combinations is unawareness. People are at risk of fentanyl and nitazenes contamination in what they believe to be ketamine only. Even one-time use can be highly dangerous.

Information produced by www.risk-and-resilience.co.uk Please note this is for guidance only.