

# How Ketamine Turned Elon Musk Into A Hitler-Like Sociopath

Story by Shayla Love

Last month, during Elon Musk's appearance at the Conservative Political Action Conference, as he hoisted a chain saw in the air, stumbled over some of his words, and questioned whether there was really gold stored in Fort Knox, people on his social-media platform, X, started posting about ketamine.

Musk has said he uses ketamine regularly, so for the past couple of years, public speculation has persisted about how much he takes, whether he's currently high, or how it might affect his behavior. Last year, Musk told CNN's Don Lemon that he has a ketamine prescription and uses the drug roughly every other week to help with depression symptoms. When Lemon asked if Musk ever abused ketamine, Musk replied, "I don't think so. If you use too much ketamine you can't really get work done," then said that investors in his companies should want him to keep up his drug regimen. Not everyone is convinced. The Wall Street Journal [has reported](#) that Musk also takes the drug recreationally, and in 2023, Ronan Farrow reported in The New Yorker that Musk's "associates" worried that ketamine, "alongside his isolation and his increasingly embattled relationship with the press, might contribute to his tendency to make chaotic and impulsive statements and decisions." (Musk did not respond to my requests for comment. In a post on X responding to The New Yorker's story, Musk wrote, "Tragic that Ronan Farrow is a puppet of the establishment and against the people.")

Ketamine is called a dissociative drug because during a high, which lasts about an hour, people might feel detached from their body, their emotions, or the passage of time. Frequent, heavy recreational use—say, several times a week—has been linked to cognitive effects that last beyond the high, including impaired memory, delusional thinking, superstitious beliefs, and a sense of specialness and importance. You can see why people might wonder about ketamine use from a man who is trying to usher in multi-planetary human life, who has barged into global politics and is attempting to reengineer the U.S. government. With Musk's

new political power, his cognitive and psychological health is of concern not only to shareholders of his companies' stocks but to all Americans. His late-night posts on X, mass emails to federal employees, and non sequiturs uttered on television have prompted even more questions about his drug use.

Ketamine's great strength has always been its ability to sever humans from the world around them. It was first approved as an anesthetic in 1970, because it could make people lose consciousness without affecting the quality of their breathing. In the 1990s, as a street drug known as Special K, ketamine took ravers to euphoric states. Then, in the 2000s, researchers found that doses of ketamine that didn't put people to sleep could rapidly reduce symptoms of depression, because, the thinking went, the drug altered the physical circuitry of the brain. In 2019, the FDA approved a nasal spray containing a form of ketamine called esketamine (sold under the brand name Spravato) for patients with depression who hadn't responded to other treatments. Spravato came with a list of rules for how the drug should be administered: in a certified medical setting by a health-care professional, and with limited dosage amounts determined by how long a person has been in treatment.

But Spravato's approval was followed by a surge in prescriptions for generic ketamine, which, because it's already FDA-approved as an anesthetic, can be administered off-label without the rules that govern esketamine. (Recreational use has shot up over the past decade too.) Some providers pair low-dose injections with talk therapy. Across the country, bespoke ketamine clinics offer shots and lozenges to treat a wide variety of mental-health conditions, including anxiety and PTSD; some focus on IV drips at doses high enough that maintaining a conversation is not feasible. Few take insurance. One market report estimated that the ketamine industry was worth nearly \$3.5 billion in 2023. Outside the clinic, the drug is reportedly popular among Silicon Valley's tech elite, and a feature at some wellness retreats, including those for leadership development, corporate team building, or couples counseling.

*[Read: The horseshoe theory of psychedelics]*

Research has not yet established the side effects of long-term ketamine therapy, but older studies of recreational users offer some insight on heavy, extended dosing. Celia Morgan, now a psychopharmacology professor at the University of Exeter, in England, led a 2010 study that followed 120 recreational ketamine users for a year. Even infrequent users—those who used, on average, roughly three times a month—scored higher on a delusional-thought scale than ex-ketamine users, people who took other drugs, and people who didn't use drugs at all. Those who averaged 20 uses a month scored even higher. People believed that they were the sole recipients of secret messages, or that society and people around them were especially attuned to them. The psychological profile of a frequent ketamine user, Morgan and her team concluded, was someone who had “profound” impairments in short- and long-term memory and was “distinctly dissociated in their day-to-day existence.” Morgan's study was not designed to determine whether people who are more likely to be delusional are also more likely to recreationally use ketamine, but Morgan told me that stopping the drug, in most cases, will dramatically reduce these side effects.

Psychedelic enthusiasts have for decades cautioned about the dangers of prolonged ketamine use, including serious damage to the bladder, intense stomach cramps, and a struggle to stop using. In 1994, the researcher D. M. Turner wrote, “A fairly large percentage of those who try Ketamine will consume it non-stop until their supply is exhausted.” John Lilly, a neurophysiologist and psychedelic researcher who once used LSD to investigate dolphin communication, famously abused ketamine until he believed that he was contacted by an extraterrestrial entity who removed his penis. “For anyone who is using a very significant amount of ketamine on a regular basis over a long period of time, I think there's good reason to suspect that they could have different kinds of cognitive and psychological forms of impairment,” David Mathai, a psychiatrist who offers ketamine therapy to some of his patients in Miami, told me.

Such theoretical impairments would be concerning in any context—but especially when contemplating a person who has achieved enough power to be unironically described as co-president of the United States. To be sure, ketamine may have nothing to do with his actions. He may be simply acting in accordance with his far-

right political ideology. Musk also famously brags that he rarely sleeps—never a good strategy for measured speech or actions.

*[Read: Elon Musk is president]*

Musk hasn't publicly acknowledged the risks of ketamine, despite having once claimed that SSRIs, the drugs commonly used to treat depression, "zombify" patients. Other highly visible ketamine promoters tend to do the same. Dylan Beynon, the founder of the ketamine telemedicine company Mindbloom, recently wrote on X, "Ketamine is not physically addictive. SSRIs are very difficult to wean off of for many." (Beynon's wife, the former head of engineering at Mindbloom, now works at DOGE.) Although ketamine doesn't lead to the same kind of physical withdrawal symptoms as opioids or alcohol, Morgan, the University of Exeter professor, said its abuse potential is widely accepted, partly because people build a tolerance to the drug very quickly. In the United Kingdom, where health data are more centralized, more than 2,000 people sought treatment for ketamine addiction in 2023. More to the point, ketamine's most dramatic risks depend on simply how much ketamine a person takes, and for how long.

Swaths of the tech world have long been drawn to Stoic philosophy, which encourages a detachment from that which is out of your control. Stoicism offers excellent coping strategies in the face of adversity—useful in an industry where most start-ups fail—but taken to extremes, it can also be a pathway to disengagement from the world and people around you. Ketamine, similarly, can afford its users space between themselves and overwhelming despair, which might help explain how it can treat depression, Mathai, the Miami psychiatrist, said. But there are consequences for leaning into that escape for too long.