Dear Alice,

Lately, I have been doing a drug called Special K. I know it is a sedative/tranquilizer (what's the difference?), but very little about side effects, etc. Also, can you go over similar information about the drug X?

Thanks,
?Crankin'

Answer

Dear Crankin',

Unlike the cereal, Special K and X aren't parts of a complete meal. They also come with their own fine print of their varying side effects, so read carefully if you choose to take them.

First, a quick vocab primer: sedatives are depressant drugs that cause restfulness in low doses, sleep in higher doses, and death in high to very high doses. High dose sedatives are called hypnotics. Sedatives include alcohol, barbiturates, and minor tranquilizers. A tranquilizer is a drug used specifically to calm or pacify.

Special K is the street name for the drug ketamine hydrochloride, also known as ketalar, ketaject, vitamin K, and super K. Ketamine is a legal prescription anesthetic for both people and animals, but some people use it recreationally in powder (commonly snorted, melted to inject, or taken orally) or pill (taken orally). Like other dissociative drugs (including DXM [2] and nitrous oxide [3]), ketamine blocks a neurotransmitter called glutamate in the brain, which blocks signals between the conscious mind with other parts of the brain. This results in the user feeling far away from her/his environment and insensitive to physical pain.

At low doses, ketamine may give a mild, dreamy feeling of floating outside of the body. Higher doses may have a euphoric or hallucinogenic effect that causes users to feel even more disassociated from their bodies, to the point where they may become unable to move or communicate. Some people refer to this sensation as entering a "K-hole" and report that it feels like a near-death experience.

Ketamine is known to cause bad reactions in some of its users. Some people may find the dissociative effects scary or disturbing, particularly at higher doses. Ketamine may make users feel nauseous and cause agitation, violent paranoia, impaired coordination, and
confusion. The user's state of mind and environment directly impacts the effects. Taking substances in a safe, calm, and familiar setting with people you trust may help keep away you from regrettable experiences. There are few studies on the long-term effects of using ketamine, but some users become psychologically dependent, and there's anecdotal evidence suggesting that frequent use may lead to problems like disruption of consciousness, amnesia, and neurosis. Because ketamine is a depressant, high doses may lower heart rate and breathing function. If you choose to take ketamine, it's important to avoid combining it with other depressants, including alcohol, Valium, or GHB, as this may cause serious health problems.

X, formally called methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA), with street alias ecstasy, XTC, and Adam, among others, is a mood elevator, or a short-term antidepressant. It works by increasing the release of serotonin, also a neurotransmitter, and results in feelings of relaxation and empathy. The effect of MDMA usually lasts four to six hours, and may cause some day-after fatigue in its users, known as E come down [4]. There's definitely a possibility of having a bad reaction to MDMA, and it's not clear at what point and why a certain amount may be a lethal overdose for some and fine for others. Ecstasy is linked to severe anxiety, depression and sleep problems, such as insomnia in some users. Additionally, effects may also include symptoms such muscle tension, nausea, blurred vision, teeth clenching, increased heart rate and blood pressure. So far, limited scientific research exists on the long-term effects of X, though emerging science indicates there may be disruptions to memory formation and other brain functions if used in high doses or over longer periods of time.

Though you didn't specifically ask, it's important to mention that combining substances presents variable risks for a user. As these substances are unregulated in their production and distribution, they don't have reliable quality assurance. Ketamine capsules have been known to be sold as ecstasy. Substances from unclear origins easily vary in purity and what it actually contains, creating risks of overdose or other adverse effects. The exact outcome of combining drugs (intentionally or unintentionally) may not be completely predicted, due to factors like the substances consumed, the frequency, the amount, etc. For those that might consider using more than one at a time, be sure to do your research (from reputable sources not necessarily just other user experiences), especially if you are on any medications or have medical conditions, and decide if the risks are acceptable for you. For more information on ketamine, ecstasy, and other substances, check out the National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information [5] and DanceSafe [6].

While these substances may sound fun and innocent like cereal, staying well informed and using good judgment weighing their desired effects and unwanted risks will help ensure that you won't accidentally snap, crackle, and pop!

Alice!
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