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# 'A £6 party drug left me crippled'



Sarah Albert was a regular ketamine user

*There's a NEW WAVE OF DRUGS on the party scene. But doctors have discovered that one of the cheapest, ketamine, has a DEVASTATING SIDE EFFECT...*

BY **HANNAH BARR & CAROLINE BENJAMIN**

**S**ide effects include blurred vision, panic attacks, coma, reduced heart rate, and in some cases death, so it might seem bizarre that ketamine is the UK's new favourite party high. But it is.

Dubbed the 'new Ecstasy' and available for just £6 a gram, it's the fastest-growing club drug among 16-24 year olds in the UK. Users say that they get surges of energy, feelings of intense euphoria, heightened sensitivity – even out-of-body experiences.

But doctors have discovered another side effect of taking the drug – and one so humiliating they hope the threat of embarrassment alone will give those considering taking it pause for thought. Recent research has found ketamine can leave users incontinent. For life.

Musician Sarah Albert, 24, from Chalk Farm, north London, had been taking the drug (which comes in a liquid or powder) for just a few months when she became incontinent as a result. The first time it happened she came round from a 'hit' of ketamine to find her jeans were soaked – she'd wet herself.

The drug, known as 'special K' on the club scene, is normally used as a horse tranquilliser, releasing toxins that suppress the nervous system and reduce bladder capacity.

"I should have been mortified when I wet myself," admits Sarah. "But I was

too numb from the drugs."

She'd been partying with her then boyfriend, Lenny, 21\*, who had also taken the drug. "I grabbed him and we took a cab home. He helped me strip off my wet jeans so I could shower and get into bed. I thought it was a one-off and pushed it to the back of my mind."

But, as Sarah soon discovered, it was far from a one-off.

The phenomenon is now termed ketamine bladder syndrome, or KBS. Dr William Shanahan, psychiatrist and medical director at London's Capio Nightingale Hospital, says surgery is often the only answer – but even that isn't always able to cure the problem.

"The toxic effect of ketamine markedly reduces bladder capacity," he says. The long-term impact is serious too.

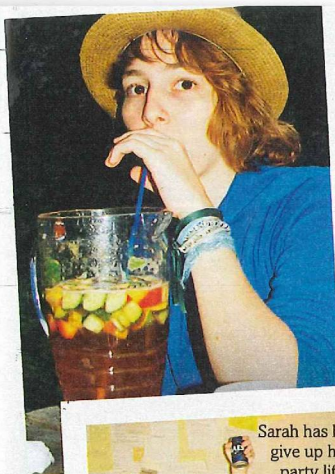
"This has major consequences for the rest of users' lives, including permanent incontinence and kidney problems," he says.

It used to be rare for specialists to come across young people with bladder problems of this type, but it's becoming increasingly common.

"Some young ketamine users have needed the kind of bladder-stretching operations more commonly performed on patients several decades older than them," Dr Shanahan reveals. Yet the drug is proving irresistible, and even celebs are being sucked in.

Singer and renowned drug user →

Photography: Getty Images \* Name has been changed



Sarah has had to give up her old party lifestyle

Amy Winehouse, 27, was rushed to hospital in August 2007 after a three-day bender. She collapsed after downing a cocktail of booze and drugs, including ketamine. She later said: "I really thought it was over for me then."

The latest British Crime Survey shows there are an estimated 125,000 users of ketamine – more than the total users of heroin and crack cocaine in England and Wales.

As a class-C drug, legally ketamine is thought of less seriously than Ecstasy (class A) or cannabis (class B), though an independent medical study conducted in 2007 ranked it as more harmful than both.

So why is it becoming so popular? It's cheap. Sarah says part of the allure was that 'special K', at £35 per gram, was cheaper than cocaine (which cost £45 per gram). Having dabbled in drugs since the age of 15, she tried it for the first time at a party in February 2007.

"I just wanted a buzz," she explains. "Minutes later, I felt as if I was drunk. Everything around me was blurry and I no longer felt in control of my body."

"The effects wore off after an hour, so I took more. I enjoyed the feeling of losing complete control that I'd never experienced with any other drug before."

Before long, Sarah was taking the drug regularly at parties and even during

the day. "But I always felt nervous before snorting it as I never knew how it was going to make me react," she says.

Ketamine has strong hallucinogenic qualities, and it's easy to zone out, which people refer to as being in a 'K-hole'.

Sarah experienced this for the first time in April 2007 after snorting half a gram of the tranquilliser. She says: "I lay down on a friend's balcony and thought I was staring at the ground and lying on the sky. I felt paralysed and started to panic. I was terrified."

It was after this K-hole that she first lost control of her bladder. Unbelievably, it didn't stop Sarah taking the drug. Once she snorted a line before hitting the shops, only to wet herself in the street.

"Suddenly, I couldn't feel my legs... and then wet myself on the pavement. People were looking at me in disgust."

"Thankfully, the topic wasn't taboo among my girlfriends who were experiencing the same problems. But although we were all taking ketamine we didn't make the connection that it was causing the problem. We used to joke about it to feel better."

But soon it was no laughing matter. "It got so bad that if I wasn't close to a toilet, I'd panic," Sarah says. "My bladder was so weak I had to go to the loo every 15 minutes."

Other side effects of ketamine include urinary tract infections and severe stomach pains dubbed 'K-cramps', all of

which Sarah suffered from. "I had cystitis, a crippling pain in my abdomen and blood in my urine," she says.

In October 2007, Sarah's boyfriend, Lenny, broke up with her because of her drug use. "I was devastated," she says. "I remember logging on to Facebook and looking at old photos of us. I cried when I saw the pictures of me looking healthy and smiling. I couldn't help comparing them to the face I now saw in the mirror. I was gaunt and haggard."

At 5ft 7in, Sarah's drug use had left her weighing just 7st. Her curves were long gone – and her skin lacked any healthy glow.

"Of course Lenny had stopped fancying me," she says. "Who would want to go out with a skeletal girl who keeps wetting herself? I was 20, not 80.

I felt desperately ashamed."

Finally, Sarah visited her GP. "I explained my symptoms and told her which drugs I'd taken over the years. She made a direct link between the ketamine and incontinence – explaining that the drug stiffens and shrinks the muscles in the bladder.

"I was devastated to be told that the damage could be permanent. But it was the wake-up call I needed. I stopped taking drugs and have now been clean for over two years."

Sarah is now a healthy 9st and is working in a shop mending musical instruments. Her bladder has strengthened – although it'll never go back to the way it was.

"I was foolish. If I'd known that my drug use would affect the rest of my life like this, I would never have done it." **U**

## THE NEW DANGER DRUGS

**NAPHYRONE** aka NRG-1 has similar effects to the rave drug Ecstasy. It's sold online as 'pond cleaner', costing £20 for 2g. Now a class-B drug, side effects include anxiety, paranoia, seizures and coma.

**BENZOCAINE** known as benzo, is a dental anaesthetic that produces a similar high to cocaine. Dealers turn it into 'brack', a substitute for crack.

**IVORY WAVE** aka Ivory Coast, Purple Wave or Vanilla Sky, is advertised as 'bath salts'. It costs £15 for a 500mg bag. It can cause kidney failure, fits and loss of bowel control.

**MEPHEDRONE** aka meow meow, is a white powder sold online as 'plant food' for as little as £10 per gram. Made illegal in April, it's now a class-B drug. Heavy use can lead to paranoia and hallucinations.

**WOOF WOOF** real name MDAI, is similar to meow meow, but believed to be up to four times stronger. It's a synthetic chemical marketed online as 'bubble bath' for £20 per gram and can be lethal.

**6-APB** aka Fury or Benzo Fury, is the latest online high, costing £7 a dose. It is said to provide a longer-lasting high than Ecstasy, but can cause heart problems.

● For more drugs advice visit [Talktofrank.com](http://Talktofrank.com) or call 0800 776600.

*Who'd want to GO OUT with a girl who WETS HERSELF?*