

POLARIS INSIGHT CENTER

Ketamine-Assisted Psychotherapy
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ONGOING INTEGRATION: TIPS AND PERSPECTIVES

Ketamine-assisted Psychotherapy (KAP), and the ketamine experience itself, are powerful and transformative processes. KAP does not occur in a vacuum and it is not meant to be a stand-alone healing intervention. Rather it is a valuable, innovative, adjunct treatment for depression and other psychological difficulties. It can serve as a unique vehicle for healing and personal growth. Specific practices during and after the medicine experiences – as well as after the series of sessions has ended – will allow individuals to maximize and extend the benefit of KAP treatment. In this way, the entire KAP experience can be seen as a valuable tool for reconsidering “who you are” in an ongoing way, and not just a treatment that one has undergone.

The power of the KAP experience is not limited to the small amount of time in which a person is under the influence of ketamine. Like many of our colleagues in this field, we at Polaris believe that KAP’s healing process should naturally unfold over the subsequent days, weeks, and months after completion of the treatment, or after the treatment has entered a maintenance phase. Sometimes, it is only through later self-reflection, spontaneously-emerging insight and/or meaningful dreams that important perspectives resulting from this work may emerge and can be integrated.

In general, the term integration refers to the weaving together of fleeting insights, images, thoughts or feelings received within one’s KAP or other altered state experiences. Here these fragments can be consciously digested and evaluated for the benefit of one’s sense of self, identity, and destiny. Then these new insights can be reconsidered in the context of one’s

practical everyday life. Most often integration refers to the processing of material in the immediate aftermath of a KAP session. However, integration also refers to a more long-term and ongoing process. All the information contained and experienced in KAP sessions requires time for contemplation and metabolization. So, for example, plunging immediately back into one's daily routine following a KAP session without a period of self-reflection may lead to missing out on some valuable perspectives, insights, and lessons. Then, after a series of sessions, one's ongoing engagement with self-reflective activities (e.g., meditation, journaling, nature walks, etc.) will support and further the benefits of integration.

Integration also includes self-care activities that support and synergize with KAP. The following list of recommendations can assist with the integration process (some may need to be validated and coordinated with a primary medical provider):

- Individual and/or group therapy, support groups, and integration groups
- Continuing prescription medications
- Nutritional supplements
- Exercise
- Acupuncture
- Healthy sleep hygiene
- Meditation
- Healthy balanced diet (including hydration)
- Meaningful work
- Recreational and social time
- Laughter and comedy
- Spiritual practice
- Time in nature and/or with animals
- Bodywork or massage
- Yoga
- Walking
- Saunas, steam, hot springs

- Movement (tai chi, martial arts, etc.), dance
- Journaling
- Decluttering, rearranging furniture, housecleaning
- Artistic expression and creative experimentation
- “Journey buddy” (a friend or partner with whom journeys are documented, tracked, and shared)

Our perspective on ketamine and KAP (and its integration) is that it works best supported by ongoing intentional actions and commitments. A multi-pronged integration plan is the most effective approach for sustainable satisfying change. Self-care can look different for every individual, and we hope the partial list above can serve as a departure point for developing one’s own personalized integration plan. Because KAP can provide a transient or lasting energy boost, it provides an optimal opportunity to try-on new behaviors, or explore new activities. Sometimes old passions and interests – currently short-circuited by psychological and emotional challenges such as depression, fearfulness, lack of confidence, low energy or general disinterest in life and other people – can re-emerge. The integration phase can also be a good time to revisit and make changes in (or eliminate) undesirable habits.

Because KAP experiences plant seeds, activate latent potentials, and inspire previously unidentified options and opportunities, one cautionary note needs to be considered. It is generally suggested that someone undertaking ketamine-assisted therapy should hold-off making any sudden, unplanned major life decisions, or consequential life changes (e.g., starting or ending a significant relationship, signing a binding contract, quitting a job, making a large purchase, leaving the country, relocating, conceiving a child, etc.) It is advised that these significant life choices be put “on hold” until after a few weeks following the majority of KAP sessions have been completed. We recommend life-changing decisions be vetted with trusted advisors, professionals, close friends and supportive family members who may help evaluate the risks and benefits of these big issues. Please feel free to contact us at Polaris at any time if you need any additional support or referrals for healing, processing, or integration.