

# Ketamine fueled actor Matthew Perry's death, but new study says it may help others

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One 10 ml vial of 1000 mg ketamine. Credit: Psychonaught/Wikipedia

Ketamine has been in the headlines recently, implicated in the high-

profile death of "Friends" actor Matthew Perry in October. But can the powerful drug also be helpful to those suffering from opioid addiction?

A University of Virginia study shows evidence it can. A component of ketamine decreases the chances of relapse in male rats addicted to opioids—which may be a sign the anesthetic can provide relief for humans as well, researchers say.

The component, r-ketamine, doesn't have ketamine's "dissociative" properties, meaning users don't feel detached from their physical bodies or environment, as is commonly experienced with the drug. It also removes the anesthetic properties, which can leave users desensitized and unaware.

Wendy Lynch, an associate professor in the School of Medicine's Department of Psychiatry and Neurobehavioral Sciences who served as the principal investigator on the study, said those findings may make r-ketamine safer to use as a potential therapeutic. The UVA-led research has been a collaboration with Perception Neuroscience Inc.

"I became interested in ketamine based on findings showing that even just one treatment can make lasting changes in [brain regions](#) implicated in addiction and other [mental health disorders](#)," Lynch said.

The study sought not only to investigate r-ketamine's efficacy, but also to understand how sex differences may apply in the rats' responses. Interestingly, [male rats](#) showed reduced drug cravings when treated with r-ketamine, but this effect was not found in female rats.

Lynch said the discrepancy requires further investigation to determine its reason. However, the finding is still a potential win-win. R-ketamine may one day be a [treatment option](#) for some people as opioid use continues to ravage the nation.

"More than 100,000 people have died in the past 12 months alone from drug overdoses," she said, "and opioids, particularly fentanyl, are the major culprits."

Lynch added other researchers are exploring the [parent compound](#), ketamine, as a possible treatment for addiction. The results there, too, have been promising.

"Despite its dissociative effects and addiction potential, ketamine is seen as a safer option in terms of harm reduction compared to drugs like heroin and fentanyl, especially considering the overdoses from opioids," she said.

Lynch, who is affiliated with the UVA Brain Institute, emphasized that [ketamine](#) should only be administered under limited circumstances, and only under close medical supervision.

Provided by University of Virginia

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