

Australia announces world-first trial with slow-release of ketamine drug to treat depression

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The slow-release tablet can be taken at home similar to current antidepressant medications, with regular support from a psychiatrist



In a world-first, researchers at the Royal Adelaide Hospital (RAH) and the University of Adelaide in Australia are seeking participants to trial a new product that uses the drug ketamine as an alternative option to treat depression.

The Central Adelaide Local Health Network- (CALHN) and University of Adelaide-led study will see researchers test a new product, which, in a tablet form, releases the drug gradually into the body to treat depression that has not responded to other forms of treatment.

Generally, there are more treatments available for depression compared to previous years, however up to 55 per cent of people can experience treatment-resistant depression where they do not respond well to the type of medications that are currently available on the market.

Ketamine is commonly used in medicine for purposes such as pain relief and anaesthesia. It is a dissociative drug, meaning it acts on brain chemicals, and can change the way the brain interprets messages in what we see, hear, and feel. Ketamine is also used and sold illegally as a hallucinogen, often in white powder form.

The slow-release ketamine tablet has passed initial volunteer trials meeting safety requirements and is currently ready to be trialled in South Australia as part of the next phase of research.