



Can a Nasal Spray Treat Depression?

An innovative new method of treating depression and mental illness may soon be coming to the UAE. The drug, taken in the form of a nasal spray, is known as esketamine and will be marketed under the name Spravato. It has been developed by Janssen Pharmaceuticals of the Johnson & Johnson Company.

Spravato has already been given the green light by the USA's Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and recently received similar approval from the European Medicines Agency (EMA) in March 2019. It's hoped that it might arrive on Emirati shores by as early as March next year.

A breakthrough treatment

Typically, anti-depressants function by aiming to increase the amounts of serotonin in the brain, which is thought to have a beneficial effect on people's emotions, moods and sleep patterns. However, esketamine differs in that it targets glutamate, a neurotransmitter believed to be integral in aiding learning, memory and normal brain function.

By switching its focus, Spravato is able to achieve remarkable results. Traditionally anti-depressants can take weeks to take effect, while a single puff of the spray in a user's nostril has been shown to have beneficial effects within 24 hours. It's also long-lasting; new users can take it once a week, but after the drug has built up reserves in their body, they can drop to biweekly use.

Mental health a serious problem

Mental health problems, including depression, are believed to affect at least 350 million individuals all over the globe, with females more susceptible to the disease than men. In the Arab world, around 17.7% of people are documented as suffering from depression, although the actual figure is feared to be far higher due to stigma associated with it.

"We want to explain in two words that mental illness is a disease in the brain. It is not mystical like people believe it to be, it is not caused by jinn, evil eye or bad spirits. It is exactly like any organic disease," [explained Professor Ahmed Okasha](#), expert on mental health in the Arab community. "Mentally ill people are discriminated against, they are isolated, hated and ostracised when they should be treated like any member of society."



Exciting new treatments

Spravato is just one of a raft of exciting new developments in the medical world, which places an emphasis on fast-acting, long-lasting solutions to all kinds of mental health problems. In one study from the US and South Korea, scientists demonstrated [how an app could control brain function](#) by using a non-intrusive implant and connected technology.

Elsewhere, researchers have discovered a new form of drug injections geared towards alleviating the effects of bipolar disorder and schizophrenia. Unlike conventional treatments for the illnesses, which must be taken in oral tablet form every day, these injections only need to be taken once every three months.