

Kratom

KEY FACTS ON KRATOM

- Kratom is not a FDA-approved treatment for Opioid Use Disorder (OUD) or any other medical disorder.
- Kratom is on the DEA Drugs of Concern list.
- It is sold in head shops and online, and there are no guarantees of kratom's quality, efficacy, or safety.
- There are reports of kratom addiction, physical dependence with withdrawal, and other harms including death.
- Stopping kratom can be challenging. Talk to your provider about ways to manage your kratom use.



What is kratom and how is it used?

Kratom comes from a plant in Southeast Asia where it has been used by some cultures since the 1800's as herbal medicine. Traditionally, kratom leaves are chewed, smoked, or consumed in tea. It is now also used as a liquid drink, swallowed as powder in a capsule, or injected.^{1,2}

Why do people use kratom?

Common reasons people use kratom are pain relief, mood symptom control, and to stimulate or alter their mood. It has been marketed as a "safe alternative to opioids" so some use it as an aid to reduce opioid use and relieve opioid withdrawal.³ However, no strong studies support these claims.

What is the legal status of kratom and where do people get it?

As of May 2022, Kratom is legal to possess and use in Kentucky, but is on the DEA Drugs of Concern List, which includes substances that are not controlled but pose risks to individuals who use them. Some states have made it illegal to possess or use kratom.² Kratom is not approved by the Food and Drug Administration for any medical indication. It is sold as a food or herbal ingredient in the U.S., which does not require safety and efficacy studies like FDA-approved medications. There is no federal monitoring or quality testing to ensure that kratom contains the ingredients listed on the label. Some kratom products have been found to contain heavy metals and salmonella, a type of bacteria.² Kratom is sold in places like head shops or online.

What are its effects?

Kratom has effects which are not fully understood. At low doses, Kratom produces stimulant like effects, and at moderate to high doses, it produces sedative and euphoric effects.⁴ Exposure to kratom can result in agitation, irritability, fast heart rate, abnormal heart rhythm, nausea, vomiting, confusion, psychosis, and seizures.^{2,5} People can experience withdrawal, including withdrawal symptoms, when trying to decrease or stop kratom use. These symptoms can include severe anxiety, muscle spasms, difficulty sleeping, and cravings to use more.^{2,6} There are growing concerns about the safety of using kratom. From 2011 to 2017, kratom exposures reported to U.S. Poison Controls Centers increased over 50-fold.⁴ Many of the most serious cases were individuals who used kratom with other substances. Complications like skin infections can occur after injection. Deaths have also been associated with kratom use, often after combining kratom with other substances.^{2,4}

References

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2. White M. Am J Health-Syst Pharm. 2019;76(23):1915-1925.
3. Garcia-Romeu et al. Drug Alcohol Depend. 2020 Mar 1;208:107849.

4. Post et al. Clin Toxicol (Phila). 2019 Oct;57(10):847-854.
5. Eggleston et al. Pharmacotherapy. 2019 Jul;39(7):775-777.
6. Weiss et al. J Addict Med. 2021 Apr 1;15(2):167-172.

Image Credit

U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration. Drug Fact Sheet: Kratom. 2020.