

Kratom

A Drug of Concern for Parents

Teens and Kratom Use

New drugs are finding their way into our kids' lives, sometimes with deadly consequences. One of these is a substance called kratom. Kratom is an herbal extract that comes from the leaves of tree grown in Southeast Asia, and typically is used in the form of a pill, capsule, or extract. The leaves of the tree contain compounds that can produce mind-altering effects. Nicknames for Kratom include: The Kratz, Thom, Ketum, Kakuam, Herbal Speedball, Thang or ithang, Kahuam, and Biak-Biak.

If you are a parent, it is important to talk about kratom with your teen, even if you don't think they are using it. Kratom use and abuse comes with various dangers. "High school and college students are surrounded by kratom these days — in smoke shops and on the internet," says Mike Milham, MD, PhD, a child and adolescent psychiatrist at the Child Mind Institute. "For students especially, you can imagine the allure of the stimulant effects, but once you start experiencing the euphoria of the opioid aspect, you're at risk for addiction."

Since kratom is made from a plant, legal, and widely available, teens might assume it is safe to use. They may try the drug for its stimulant effects, to help them prepare for a test, relieve anxiety, or help with stress and depression. Standard drugs tests are not designed to detect kratom, which may increase its appeal.

Teens are generally more susceptible to psychoactive compounds and their addictive potential - and teens who are exposed to addictive substances are more likely to become addicted than if they first tried substances later in adulthood. The teen brain is not fully matured, which means the neurological changes over prolonged and chronic drug use may occur faster and more intensely in teens than adults.

"Kratom should not be used to treat medical conditions, nor should it be used as an alternative to prescription opioids. There is no evidence to indicate that kratom is safe or effective for any medical use."

Scott Gottlieb, Former FDA Commissioner, 2018



PREVENTION SERVICES

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What is Kratom?

Kratom is a substance derived from the leaves of the *Mitragyna speciosa* plant, which is in the coffee family and is native to Southeast Asia. It has been used there as a herbal medicine since at least the nineteenth century.

In the United States, kratom use is a relatively new phenomenon that has increased considerably in recent years. According to SAMHSA, data from a 2019 NSDUH survey showed that about 825,000 people had used kratom in the past month. It is commonly sold in powdered form or as dried leaves and can be taken in capsules or made into a tea.

The effects of kratom differ depending on the amount used. In large doses, two of the compounds in kratom leaves, mitragynine and 7- α -hydroxymitragynine, interact with opioid receptors in the brain, producing pleasurable, pain-reducing effects like opioids do. At low doses, mitragynine interacts with other receptor systems in the brain, producing stimulant effects, like increased energy, sociability, and alertness.

Is Kratom Legal?

The legality of kratom is confusing. Even though kratom is not illegal at the federal level, there are many states that have banned its use. Kratom is legal in Florida, except in Sarasota County, where the possession of kratom is punishable by a fine up to \$500 and 60 days in jail. Kratom is easily accessible to young people because there are no age restrictions for buying it and it is widely available in gas stations, convenience stores, smoke shops, and online.

There are currently no U.S. Food and Drug Administration-approved uses for kratom, and the DEA lists kratom as a "Drug and Chemical of Concern". The FDA warns consumers not to use kratom because it "appears to have properties that expose users to the risks of addiction, abuse, and dependence". There are sixteen countries that consider kratom a scheduled drug due to its psychoactive properties. However, the U.S. is not one of them.

Food and Drug Administration

The History of Kratom

In Southeast Asia, kratom is commonly used by fisherman, rubber-tappers, farmers, and other manual laborers while they work. They traditionally chew the chopped fresh or dried kratom leaves to sustain energy and prevent fatigue, as well as to relieve pain and improve their mood, thus increasing work productivity during a hard day of labor under the sweltering sun.

US National Library of Medicine

Incidences of kratom-related mortality appear to be rising, according to reporting by the CDC, which linked kratom to 152 deaths between 2016 and 2017.

Lack of Regulation

Kratom is not regulated by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) so there is no way to know how potent any given amount is, or if a batch also contains other illicit substances.

Teens can be targeted as customers for cheaper, lower quality kratom products. Because of the lack of regulations and oversight on the drug's production and processing, it is also unclear what other substances might be mixed into any kratom or "kratom-related" products.

Kratom Poisoning and Death

In April 2019, the FDA released results of a laboratory analysis that found significant levels of lead and nickel in 30 kratom products — enough to potentially cause heavy metal poisoning.

Most reports of deaths in conjunction with kratom usage involved the use of kratom in combination with other substances, such as diphenhydramine (an antihistamine), alcohol, caffeine, cocaine, benzodiazepines, and fentanyl. In 2017, the FDA identified at least 44 deaths related to kratom, with at least one case investigated as possible use of pure kratom.

National Institute on Drug Abuse

Effects Of Kratom Use

Kratom can cause uncomfortable and even dangerous side effects, such as:

- Nausea
- Itching
- Sweating
- Dry Mouth
- Constipation
- Increased urination
- Loss of appetite
- Seizures
- Hallucinations
- Runny Nose

Symptoms of psychosis have been reported in some users. And, like other drugs with opioid-like effects, kratom might cause dependence or even addiction, which means users will feel physical withdrawal symptoms when they stop taking the drug. These may include:

- Muscle aches
- Mood swings
- Aggression

National Institute on Drug Abuse

Local Kratom Seizure

In May 2021, the U.S. Marshals, on behalf of the FDA, seized more than \$1.47 million in dietary supplements and ingredients that are or contain kratom. The products were being manufactured by a Premier subsidiary, Atofil LLC, which is based in Fort Myers.

Self-Prescribed Supplement

Kratom use is a growing trend in the United States. Many people see kratom as an all-natural supplement that helps with a variety of physical and mental ailments, including pain management, depression, anxiety, obesity, and as an energy booster.

According to NIDA, “In recent years, some people have used kratom as an herbal alternative to medical treatment in attempts to control cravings and withdrawal symptoms caused by addiction to opioids or to other addictive substances, including alcohol. Because kratom affects the same brain receptors as opioids do, it is essentially like substituting one opioid addiction for another one.”



The FDA states, “In general, consumers should be cautious of products marketed and sold online with unproven claims to prevent, treat, mitigate, or cure diseases.”



**OVER 90%
OF SUBSTANCE
ABUSERS BEGAN
USING DRUGS**

National Center for Addiction and Substance Abuse

Parent Resources

If you suspect that your child is using kratom, discuss the dangers of the drug with them.

Parents who are educated about the effects of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs, including kratom, are able to give their children the facts to help protect them against drug use.

<https://teens.drugabuse.gov/parents>

<https://www.drugabuse.gov/drug-topics/children-teens>

<https://www.fda.gov/news-events/public-health-focus/fda-and-kratom>