

Cheltenham Communities That Care

NEW SUBSTANCE OF CONCERN: KRATOM

By Wendy Rosenfeld, Community Mobilizer

WHAT IS KRATOM?

Kratom is an herbal substance derived from the leaves of the *Mitragyna Speciosa* tree found in Southeast Asia. These leaves contain chemical compounds, known as alkaloids, which can be broken down further into single components. Two of these components, mitragynine and 7-hydroxymitragynine (7-OH), are the main chemical components found in kratom.

In this natural form, kratom's multiple chemical compound structure contains 66% mitragynine and 1-2% 7-OH. This can be altered, though, if kratom is created synthetically and reconfigured with a different ratio of components.



HOW IS KRATOM USED?

In its natural form, kratom is often used as a dietary supplement. Purchased as powder, capsules, tea, gummies, and liquid extracts, it can easily be obtained without a prescription at smoke shops, specialty stores, vitamin shops, convenience stores, gas stations, and online.

Kratom has also been used, in high doses, to self-manage drug withdrawal symptoms (such as opioid withdrawal), drug cravings, pain, anxiety, and depression. When taken in low doses, kratom has been used as a stimulant to increase energy and alertness.

IS KRATOM APPROVED FOR MEDICAL USE?

No. Kratom (natural or synthetic) has not been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for treating any known medical condition. Because of this, no safety standards are in place for kratom.

IS KRATOM LEGAL IN PENNSYLVANIA?

Yes. While laws vary from state to state, kratom is legal in Pennsylvania. Individuals age 18 and older are able to purchase it.



Photo Credit: The Detroit News



This newsletter is produced by Cheltenham Communities That Care (CTC).

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IS KRATOM SAFE TO USE?

Nicknamed “gas station heroin”, kratom does not have the approval of the FDA, which has determined that it should not be legally marketed as a dietary supplement or food additive. Moreover, with no proven medical benefits, kratom has been declared unsafe as a medication, especially for self-treatment and long-term use. Individuals should consult a licensed physician for proper treatment of their medical conditions.

When produced synthetically with a high concentration of 7-OH (up to 98%), kratom becomes much more potent and dangerous. In fact, the FDA found 7-OH to be 13 times more potent than morphine. These high levels of 7-OH react with receptors in the brain and can result in intense and dangerous opioid-like reactions, dependence, addiction, and faster-paced tolerance and withdrawal symptoms. Synthetic versions of kratom also carry a greater risk of contamination with bacteria and/or other harmful substances, including fentanyl and hydrocodone.

Kratom is an addictive substance. Users can develop a dependency on the drug and suffer from withdrawal symptoms when they stop taking it. Despite this, kratom is only listed as a “drug of concern” by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), not as a controlled substance.

SIDE EFFECTS OF KRATOM

- | | | | | |
|-----------------------|------------------|----------------------|--------------|----------------|
| • High blood pressure | • Weight loss | • Seizures | • Depression | • Dizziness |
| • Confusion | • Liver problems | • Trouble breathing | • Vomiting | • Drowsiness |
| • Hallucinations | • Nausea | • Negative reactions | • Delusions | • Muscle pain |
| • Tremors | • Dry mouth | with other drugs | • Addiction | • Constipation |

BUYER BEWARE: MARKETING AND KRATOM

Because kratom continues to be marketed as a supplement, it is not subject to standardized product testing, so products may be labeled with incomplete and misleading information.

In marketing a substance as a supplement, manufacturers do not have to provide evidence to the FDA that a product works as advertised. They can make claims such as “supports immune health,” but these claims do not require scientific proof as long as the claims are accompanied by the following disclaimer: *"This statement has not been evaluated by the Food and Drug Administration. This product is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any disease."* Further, the FDA bears the burden of proof to show that a supplement is unsafe before it can be removed from the market, which can be a long and difficult process. **What is unregulated often goes unchecked.** This impacts quality control and oversight of kratom in its production, sales, labeling, and advertising, especially in high concentrations and in synthetic forms.
(<https://www.cheltenhamtownship.org/newsview.aspx?nid=6606#gsc.tab=0>)

**Special thanks to Cheltenham
Emergency Medical Services for all
of the work they do to keep our
community safe, including alerting
Cheltenham CTC to this issue.**

**If you or someone you know is
struggling with addiction or a
mental health issue, call 9-8-8
for assistance.**



OTHER NAMES FOR KRATOM

- | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------|
| • Mitragyna speciosa | • ketum |
| • mitragynine extract | • krathom |
| • biak-biak | • krton |
| • cratom | • mambog |
| • gratom | • madat |
| • ithang | • Maeng da leaf |
| • kakuam | • nauclea |
| • katawn | • Nauclea speciosa |
| • kedemba | • thang |