

### Kratom – A New Concern



Over the past year we have begun hearing about Kratom. We first heard of a controversial new program in an article published in the Portland Press Herald in January 2018 titled: **Controversial Portland Program Uses Marijuana and Kratom to Treat Opioid Addiction**. This article concerned the opening of a residential treatment program in Portland, Maine called “Greener Pastures” This program planned to serve women seeking recovery from severe Opioid Use Disorder. This program’s treatment philosophy is to use kratom for withdrawal and Marijuana for the long term treatment of Opioid Use Disorder. While

kratom has been legal, **the “FDA and many treatment experts say there is no credible evidence to support their use”** (Online: <https://www.pressherald.com/2018/01/28/controversial-portland-treatment-program-uses-marijuana-and-kratom-to-treat-opioid-addiction/> ).



The Controversy around the use of kratom continues. The internet is clogged with debates over the use of this herb. Proponents of kratom claim it has medical benefits and may be significant in helping battle the Opioid crisis. In a recent statement from the FDA Commissioner, Scott Gottlieb, M.D., he reported, “there is evidence that certain substances found in kratom are opioids and data suggest that one or more may have a potential for abuse. And its use has been on the rise and is of concern to the FDA. We’re not alone in our concern about the opioids found in kratom – it’s already illegal or

controlled in several other countries including Australia, Denmark, Germany, Malaysia and Thailand. The substance is also banned in a number of states and municipalities in the U.S.

Science and evidence matter in demonstrating medical benefit, especially when a product is being marketed to treat serious diseases like opioid use disorder (OUD). However, to date, there have been no adequate and well-controlled scientific studies involving the use of kratom as a treatment for opioid use withdrawal or other diseases in humans. Nor have there been studies on how kratom, when combined with other substances, may impact the body, its dangers, potential side effects, or interactions with other drugs”

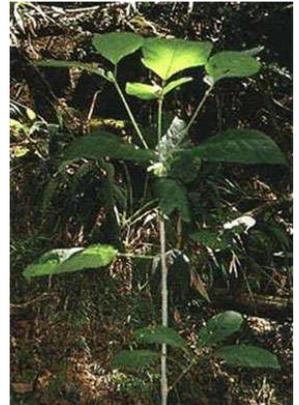
(Online: <https://www.fda.gov/NewsEvents/Newsroom/PressAnnouncements/ucm620106.htm> ).

On February 21, 2018 the National Institute on Drug Abuse posted warnings of possible Salmonella infections linked to kratom products on their ***Emerging Trends and Alerts*** site. This report was based on a report from the FDA Food & Drug; ***FDA investigated Multiple Outbreak of Salmonella Infections Linked to Products Reported to Contain Kratom***. The report stated that kratom or kratom containing products were identified as the likely source of the outbreak. According to the CDC as of May 2018, 199 people in 41 states were infected with the outbreak strains of Salmonella. Fifty of these people were hospitalized and no deaths were reported.

(Online: <https://www.fda.gov/food/recallsoutbreaksemergencies/outbreaks/ucm597265.htm> ).

### **What is Kratom, where did it come from and how has it been used?**

DrugAbuse.Com reports, “Kratom (*Mitragyna speciosa*) is a tree-like plant from Southeast Asia that belongs to the same family of plants as coffee and gardenias. Kratom has been used as an herbal remedy in Thailand and neighboring countries for hundreds of years for a number of ailments. It has dose-dependent stimulant and opiate-like effects. In addition to being used for an energy boost as well as for some mild pain relief, there is some anecdotal evidence to suggest that it may be helpful in the management of withdrawal symptoms. Although the plant has a long history of use as an herbal medicine in Southeast Asia, kratom abuse is also well known in the region and the drug has been banned in Thailand, Malaysia, and Myanmar due to its addictive potential. Some chemicals found in kratom interfere with drug-metabolizing enzymes in the liver and may cause dangerous interactions with other drugs or medications. Overdoses - some of them fatal - have been reported in users who have taken it in combination with other drugs” (online: <https://drugabuse.com/library/the-effects-of-kratom-use/> ).



### **How Do People obtain Kratom?**

According to National Institute on Drug Abuse, “Kratom is not currently an illegal substance and has been easy to order on the internet. It is sometimes sold as a green powder in packets labeled "not for human consumption." It is also sometimes sold as an extract or gum. Kratom sometimes goes by the following names: Biak, Ketum, Kakuam, Ithang, Thom.”

## How is it Used?

Kratom is used as a pill, capsule, or extract. Some people chew kratom leaves or brew the dried or powdered leaves as a tea. Sometimes the leaves are smoked or eaten in food (Online: <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/kratom> ).

## What are the health effects of kratom?

Nausea	Itching	Sweating
Dry mouth	Constipation	Increased urination
Loss of appetite	Seizures	Hallucinations

Symptoms of psychosis have been reported in some users.

## Side effects can include:

- Respiratory depression    Nervousness    Agitation
- Aggression    Sleeplessness    Hallucinations
- Delusions    Tremors    Loss of libido
- Constipation

## Withdrawal?

The symptoms of withdrawal from Kratom are similar to Opioid withdrawal. These withdrawal symptoms can include:

Craving	Depression	Anxiety
Restlessness	Nausea	Sweating
Muscle aches	Irritability/Hostility	Diarrhea
Runny nose	Tremors	Hallucinations
Mood swings	Insomnia	Aggression
Emotional changes		
Jerky movements		

## Long Term Effects

“Research done on chronic, high-dose kratom users in Thailand [concluded] there are several unusual long-term effects of this drug such as: Hyperpigmentation, or darkening of facial skin, Anorexia and weight loss, Psychosis ( Online: <https://drugabuse.com/library/the-effects-of-kratom-use/>).

## Can people overdose on Kratom?

According to the FDA, there have been at least 44 deaths reported related to the use of Kratom. “...with at least one case being investigated as possible use of pure kratom. Most kratom associated deaths appear to have resulted from adulterated products (other drugs mixed in with the kratom) or taking Kratom along with potent substances including illicit drugs, opioids, benzodiazepines, alcohol, gabapentin, and over-the-counter medications, such as cough syrup. Also, there have been some reports of kratom packaged as dietary supplements or dietary ingredients that were laced with other compounds that caused deaths” (Online: <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/kratom>)

## For More information:

Drugs.Com

<https://www.drugs.com/illicit/kratom.html>

U.S. Drug & Food Administration: **FDA warns companies selling illegal, unapproved kratom products marketed for opioid cessation, pain treatment and other medical uses**

<https://www.fda.gov/newsevents/newsroom/pressannouncements/ucm608447.htm>

U.S. Drug & Food Administration: **Statement from FDA Commissioner Scott Gottlieb, M.D., on the agency's scientific evidence on the presence of opioid compounds in kratom, underscoring its potential for abuse**

<https://www.fda.gov/newsevents/newsroom/pressannouncements/ucm595622.htm>

**Kratom: Clinical Implications for Nurse Practitioners**

<http://nursing.advanceweb.com/kratom-clinical-implications-for-nurse-practitioners/>

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