

The science and research behind kratom

Studies are increasing the potential applications for the plant and dispelling previous mischaracterizations.



Overview

Kratom (*Mitragyna speciosa*) is a plant used for hundreds of years in Asia that can boost energy, reduce anxiety and depression, or act as a natural painkiller. Millions of Americans use the substance, mainly for its pain-relieving properties and as a safer alternative to opioids.

Promising research

Federal agencies and health organizations have funded more scientific research to understand the potential benefits of kratom. This growing body of research is showing promising results of positive impacts, including in areas such as opioid use disorder treatment.

“We feel that this is a possible solution to the opioid epidemic, and it could come from nature.”

DR. CHRISTOPHER R. MCCURDY,
A KRATOM RESEARCHER WITH
THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA.

A new study found that mitragynine, kratom’s primary alkaloid, does not produce negative, opioid-like respiratory effects even at doses many times higher than those known to be taken by humans.

Federally funded scientific studies

The National Institute on Drug Abuse has committed tens of millions of dollars to researching potential medicinal and therapeutic uses of kratom, including providing non-addictive pain relief, treating opioid and alcohol use disorders, and reducing anxiety and depression.

Several other agencies are also conducting research, including the National Institutes of Health, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Food and Drug Administration and the World Health Organization.

Low potential for abuse

Current research suggests a significantly lower potential for abuse compared with other powerful pain relievers. Johns Hopkins Medicine researchers concluded kratom has a lower rate of harm than prescription opioids for treating pain, anxiety, depression and addiction.



“Findings point toward the potential of this drug in pain research as well as the need for further research on the pharmacology of kratom’s constituents, their toxicity and potential value in the treatment of opioid use disorder.”

*DR. NORA D. VOLKOW, M.D.,
DIRECTOR OF THE NATIONAL
INSTITUTE ON DRUG ABUSE AT THE
NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH.*

Recent federal and international activity

In 2016, the DEA withdrew a proposal to schedule kratom under the Controlled Substances Act in response to tens of thousands of public comments from kratom consumers and bipartisan members of Congress.

In 2018, the Department of Health and Human Services said that kratom should not be controlled “temporarily or permanently until scientific research can sufficiently support such an action.”

And in 2021, the World Health Organization concluded there was insufficient evidence of adverse health effects from kratom that would warrant its inclusion in the United Nation’s list of internationally controlled substances.

Unfortunately, inaccurate and outdated claims by the Food and Drug Administration continue to surface despite scientific evidence that kratom can be a powerful tool in the fight against opioid use.

“We believe that additional data and information are needed to understand the public health impact of kratom in terms of therapeutic benefits as well as safety risk.”

*HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
SECRETARY XAVIER BECERRA, IN
A 2022 LETTER TO LAWMAKERS.*

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