

Kava

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What is Kava?

Kava is a depressant (<https://adf.org.au/drug-facts/depressants/>) drug, which means it slows down the messages travelling between the brain and the body. Kava is made from the root or stump of the kava (Piper methysticum) shrub.¹

Kava comes in different forms including:

- brownish-coloured drink
- brown powder
- capsules
- extracts
- drops.

<--- Good info

Other names

Kava kava, kawa, waka, lewena, yaqona, grog (Fiji), sakau (Pohnpei), 'awa (Hawaii), 'ava (Samoa) and wati (New Guinea).⁴

<--- Correct

Other types of depressants

- **Alcohol** (<https://adf.org.au/drug-facts/alcohol/>)
- **Benzodiazepines** (<https://adf.org.au/drug-facts/benzodiazepines/>)
- **GHB** (<https://adf.org.au/drug-facts/ghb/>)

[Read more about importation of kava](https://www.odc.gov.au/import-restrictions-kava-and-khat)(<https://www.odc.gov.au/import-restrictions-kava-and-khat>)

How is it used?

Pacific Islands

Traditionally, Pacific Islanders crushed, chewed and ground the root and stump of the shrub, then soaked it in cold water to produce a drink for ceremonies and cultural practices. These rituals were said to strengthen ties

among groups, reaffirm status and help people communicate with spirits.¹ <--- Good to see this being mentioned

Many Pacific Islanders who have settled in Australia have continued drinking kava or using kava extracts.⁵

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

Kava was introduced to the communities in the north of Australia in the 1980s as a substitute for alcohol, to reduce alcohol-related harms in the community. The kava drink is often used for sedative, hypnotic and muscle-relaxant effects, in much the same way that alcohol is used.¹¹ <--- Correct.

Herbal preparations

Kava extract is used in some herbal preparations. They are sold as over-the-counter tablets and preparations to be used in the treatment of insomnia, stress and anxiety.⁶

Effects of kava

There is no safe level of drug use. Use of any drug always carries some risk. Even medications can produce unwanted side effects. It's important to be careful when taking any type of drug.

Kava affects everyone differently, based on:

- size, weight and health
- whether the person is used to taking it
- whether other drugs are taken around the same time
- the amount taken
- the strength of the drug.

<--- No argument

The following effects may be experienced:

- feeling happy and relaxed
- mild sleepiness
- numb mouth and throat
- reduced or loss of appetite.⁷

If a large amount of kava is taken the following effects may also be experienced:

- drowsiness
- nausea
- loss of muscle control
- mild fever <---Not something we usually see.€
- pupil dilation and red eyes.⁷

Long-term effects

Regular use of large amounts of kava may eventually cause:

- mood swings

- apathy
- dry, scaly skin
- malnutrition and severe weight loss
- getting infections more easily
- shortness of breath.³

Neither of these are something we see, nor do they give any explanation in the sources. Å€

Manufactured products such as herbal remedies that contain kava extract have been linked to irreversible liver damage. Kava has been shown to cause liver damage when taken in an alcoholic or acetonc extract. For this reason, water based extracts of Kava (as a drink or tablet) should not be consumed with alcohol, especially if there is a history of liver damage or disease.^{7,8}

Using kava with other drugs

Kava changes the way that the liver processes some types of medications and drugs, therefore you should consult with your healthcare provider before taking Kava.⁷

- Kava + alcohol (<https://adf.org.au/drug-facts/alcohol/>): increased drowsiness, impaired reflexes and risk of liver damage.
- Kava + benzodiazepines (<https://adf.org.au/drug-facts/benzodiazepines/>): sedation.³ <---Both good

Kava in Australia

The import, advertising and sale of kava in Australia are strictly controlled. Kava is listed as a controlled substance under the Customs (Prohibited Imports) Regulations Act.

Commercial importations of kava are no longer allowed, except for medical or scientific purposes.

Passengers coming into Australia, who are over the age of 18 years, are allowed to bring 4kg of kava without a license or permit, provided it is in their accompanied baggage.

Restrictions in Western Australia and the Northern Territory mean that kava cannot be brought into these jurisdictions.

The Australian Government's Budget 2020-21 included measures to increase consumer access to kava and are due to be implemented by 2021.⁹

Further information (<https://www.odc.gov.au/publications/increasing-consumer-access-kava>)

Withdrawal

There is no evidence that people who regularly use kava become dependent on the drug, so if you stop taking it, you are unlikely to experience withdrawal symptoms. However, if you have health problems seek medical advice.⁷

Getting help

If your use of Kava is affecting your health, family, relationships, work, school, financial or other life situations, you should seek help and support. Call 1300 85 85 84 to speak to a real person and get answers to your questions as well as advice on practical 'next steps'.

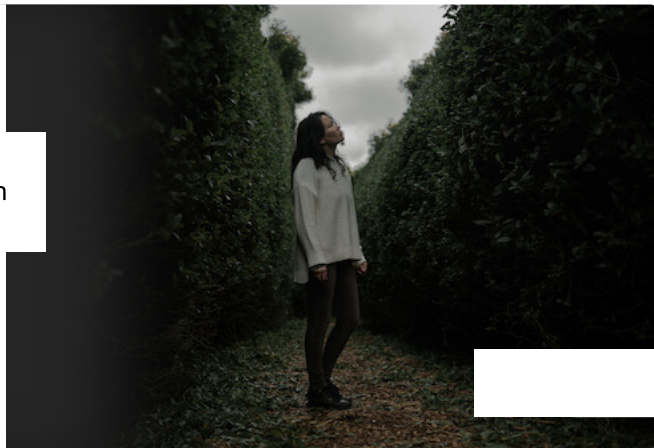
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Explore depressants on the Drug Wheel

