KRATOM USE IN TEENS & YOUNG ADULTS

What Every Professional Helper Should Know

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What do you already know about kratom?

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MITRAGYNA SPECIOSA

- Plant used for centuries in SE Asia
- Leaves chewed or brewed into tea
- When chewed or brewed, has a fairly mild effect
- Stimulant effects at lower dose
- Opioid-like effects at higher dose

Started showing up in US about 20 years ago

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KRATOM

- For import, leaves are picked, dried & turned into powder
- This processing makes it more potent than how it's used in SE Asia
- Primarily used recreationally
- Also used for pain relief or to aid opioid cessation
  No evidence, but…

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GAS STATION DRUG

- Sold in gas stations, vape shops & online
- Sold as powder, gummies, tablets, or beverage
- Often mixed with caffeine, CBD, or kava
- Potency & ingredients often mislabeled

Per a client, kratom tastes like "dried horse shit mixed with cut grass"

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7-OH

- 7-hydroxymitragynine
- Occurs naturally in trace amounts
- Sold in highly concentrated tablets, gummies & shots
- Up to 13x more potent than morphine Per FDA
- Strong potential for withdrawal, dependence & overdose

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WHY IT MATTERS

- Estimates indicate over 5 million people in the U.S. have used kratom
- 1.7 million regularly using
- Highest usage reported among young adults ages 21–34
- Use is increasing
- Readily available & marketed in ways that suggest it isn't dangerous
- Highly addictive

Various online sources 7/14/26

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Is This Even Legal?

This information is changing quickly
Last fact check: 10/01/26

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WASHINGTON STATE

No statewide laws or restrictions against possession, use or distribution of kratom or 7-OH

Bellingham, Spokane, Spokane Valley, Othello & Cheney
Sale & distribution is banned, but possession is legal

Cle Elum
City council adopted an emergency moratorium that bans sale & distribution

Moses Lake
21+ age restriction

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OTHER STATES

9 states & DC ban the sale of kratom
Alabama, Arkansas, Connecticut, Indiana, Kansas, Louisiana, Tennessee, Vermont & Wisconsin

1 state has 21+ age restriction
Rhode Island

Some municipalities ban the sale of kratom

Several municipalities have age restrictions

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NATIONALLY

- **As of 8/26/26, DEA made *temporary* emergency order classifying 7-OH as Schedule 1 controlled substance**
- **DEA has proposed 7-OH be permanently classified as Schedule 1 controlled substance**
- **As of 10/01/26 this proposal remains under review with no date for decision**
- **This temporary classification doesn't affect *botanical kratom***

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What happens if kratom becomes illegal?

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Treatment Considerations

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USING IS FUNCTIONAL

Maladaptive coping strategy

Functional, but not effective
Seems to help in the moment
Makes things worse in the long term

Acknowledging the function isn't the same as endorsing use

"When I'm high, I don't think about the past and don't worry about the future. For a little while, my brain shuts up and I can pretend that everything is okay."
Andrew, treatment journal

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UNPACKING FUNCTION

- **Kratom users have a high rate of CODs**
- **Most common: other substances, depression, anxiety, trauma**
- **If we don't address function, lasting change is unlikely**
- **Turn down the volume on their reason for using**

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WITHDRAWAL CONCERNS

Symptoms similar to both opioid & stimulant withdrawal

TYPICAL TIME FRAME
Onset as soon as 6 hours
Peaks at 24 to 72 hours
Last up to 2 weeks
PAWS is common

SYMPTOMS INCLUDE...
Muscle aches
Insomnia
Anxiety
Depression
Nausea
Vomiting
Irritability
Intense cravings

Plus: Loss of primary coping strategy

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MANAGING WITHDRAWALS

Tapering is often recommended

Reduces possibility of triggering a withdrawal/relapse cycle. Not an option if client has strong external mandates or kratom disappears from market.

Withdrawal isn't life threatening, but…

Can lead to severe dehydration, which could lead to physical health concerns. Can increase mental health concerns. Polysubstance use increases withdrawal risks.

Suboxone can help

Off-label use. Only addresses the opioid-like symptoms. Some doctors are reluctant to prescribe it.

Suboxone gets skipped

Skipping doses is extremely dangerous. Extended injectables exist, but not widely available, expensive & require a Suboxone trial first.

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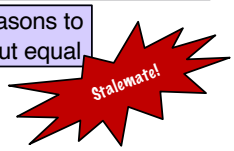
HIGH AMBIVALENCE

Simultaneously believing two seemingly contradictory ideas

AMBIVALENCE IS…

Normal, because change is hard
Exacerbated by withdrawal concerns
Indicates of Contemplation
Suggestive of an existential crisis

Status quo & reasons to change are about equal



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RESOLVING AMBIVALENCE

- **Normalize, normalize, normalize**
- **Change the balance between *Things As Is* and *Doing Something New***
- **Foster self-efficacy**
- **Disrupt rigid thinking**
- **Address existential concerns**
- **Other motivational interviewing strategies**

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STUCK
Our goal is to help clients get unstuck.
"Anything I do is gonna make things worse."
Ben, current client

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