



# *Kava Kava*

*Tense? Stressed Out? Need a good night's sleep? Let **Kava Kava** soothe your mind and body naturally. This popular Polynesian herb is famous for *calming the nerves, easing tense muscles and enhancing mental acuity, memory and sensory perception.**

**Information:** Herbals/Nutritionals/Medicinals can be very strong. Consequently, if they are not tailored to your specific needs, they can do more harm than good. This information is meant to be used by your VHC Medical Team and personal Physician as they build your Total Health Plan. Never attempt to adjust your prescribed medications and/or Natural Treatments without your physician's and Medical Team's knowledge and guidance. Since herbals/nutritionals and medications can interact with each other, it is always advisable to consult with your health care provider and The Vibrant Health Community at [www.VibrantHealthCommunity.com](http://www.VibrantHealthCommunity.com) (or call 1-866-378-8253) before starting or changing your program.

**Botanical:** *Piper methysticum*

**Family:** *Piperaceae* (black pepper)

**Other common names:** Ava Ava Pepper, Intoxicating Pepper, Kawa Awa, Kawa Kawa, Yogona, Wati, Waka, Kava Pepper, Kava

**History:** Kava Kava is an evergreen shrub that is native to the Polynesian Islands of the South Pacific and is commonly cultivated in Australia and Hawaii. It is an erect shrub that grows in height from ten to twenty feet with tender fleshy stems, heart-shaped leaves and flowers with a lilac aroma. The dried root is an aromatic, bitter and pungent warming herb that is used in herbal medicine. South Pacific Islanders have used Kava Kava for over three thousand years as an important medicinal herb to kill pain (the root actually leaves the mouth feeling slightly numbed when chewed) and induce a state of relaxation and euphoria. The roots were also made into a sacred drink called *Sakau*, which marked important social and ceremonial rites, particularly meetings involving conflicts or war councils, since the herb is known to promote a state of goodwill and relaxation among parties trying to reconcile their differences. Kava Kava was first discovered for Western use by the explorer, Captain James Cook, who gave the plant its botanical name, which translates to "intoxicating pepper." The name Kava carries the meanings of "sour," "bitter" or "sharp," which may be some indication of the taste of the beverage. Some of Kava Kava's chemical constituents include cinnamic acid and kavalactones/alphapyrones (including kawain, dihydrokawain, methysticin, dihydromethysticin and yangonin).

**Beneficial Uses:** Kava Kava is a mild, but effective, sedative that induces physical and mental relaxation and helps to reduce anxiety without dulling the mind. As a matter of fact, although it is used mostly for its sedative properties, it does not seem to impair the user's mental clarity and has been known to improve memory and sensory perception. Several of Kava's chemical ingredients interact with the brain's benzodiazepine receptors, which are the same sites activated by synthetic tranquilizers; but unlike addictive prescription drugs that frequently worsen depression, Kava Kava improves the mood and is not considered to be addictive. It is frequently used to treat nervous tension, depression and anxiety disorders, particularly agoraphobia and social phobias. It is also said to be extremely helpful for treating insomnia.

For genitourinary health, Kava Kava acts as an antiseptic tonic that makes it suitable for treating problems in the urinary tract, including bladder infections, cystitis, gallbladder complaints, gonorrhea and prostate gland inflammation. Additionally, its diuretic properties help to reduce water retention. Its antiseptic qualities may be further utilized as a douche to counter vaginitis.

Kava Kava is also considered a tonic stimulant. The Polynesians used it as a stimulant in small doses to create a mild state of euphoria. The herb is still thought to produce the same effects and is believed to invigorate a diminished sex drive.

As a tonic, Kava Kava is also said to stimulate the gastrointestinal tract, easing indigestion.

Kava Kava stimulates the entire nervous system and promotes physical flexibility and structural alignment by influencing the motor units of the nervous system. By acting as an anti-spasmodic, the herb relaxes muscle tension, reduces pain and cramping due to muscle spasms and alleviates restless leg syndrome, among other muscular complaints. It is actually thought to be one of the most powerful of the herbal muscle relaxants.

As an anti-inflammatory, Kava Kava is believed to help relieve arthritis, gout and rheumatism. Used externally, it may also be used to relieve joint pain.

Kava Kava is believed to be a remarkable painkiller whether taken internally or externally. It is an effective analgesic that is said to ease headaches and even toothaches, and its analgesic properties are thought to have strength comparable to that of cocaine and procainamide, which helps to deaden the pain in the kidneys and urinary tract when excretion occurs. The potent painkilling qualities usually last for twenty-four hours. When applied externally, Kava may be applied directly to a painful wound for relief.

**Contraindications:** Those who suffer with Parkinson's disease should avoid Kava Kava, as it may worsen muscular weakness. Pregnant or nursing women should not take this product. Kava Kava should not be taken on a daily basis for longer than three months, as long-term use may cause severe liver damage. Excess use may disturb vision, dilate pupils, affect walking or driving and cause stupor, and it should be used only occasionally to relieve periods of stress or sleeplessness. Taking Kava and medicines to treat mental illnesses may add to the side effects of these medicines such as involuntary movements of the arms, neck or face. Taking Kava may interfere with the actions of some medicines used to treat nausea and vomiting resulting in the return of symptoms otherwise controlled by medicines. Kava Kava should never be taken after consuming alcohol. Those who are taking pharmaceutical antidepressants, benzodiazepine tranquilizers or sleeping pills should avoid Kava. It may be best to avoid operating machinery when taking Kava, as it may cause drowsiness. Consult a physician before taking Kava Kava if you use oral contraceptives, anti-seizure medications, HIV drug prescriptions, anticoagulants or any prescriptions. Kava Kava should be avoided for two weeks prior to any elective surgery. Kava Kava is not recommended for people with severe anxiety disorders and/or severe depression. Chronic over-consumption may produce dry skin, labored breathing, alteration of red and white blood cell counts, and if any of these symptoms appear, its use should be discontinued immediately. The herb is not recommended for persons under eighteen years of age. Constant, long-term use has been associated with damage to the liver, skin, eyes and spinal cord.

FDA Consumer Advisory - Kava Kava

## **KAVA-CONTAINING DIETARY SUPPLEMENTS MAY BE ASSOCIATED WITH SEVERE LIVER INJURY**

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is advising consumers of the potential risk of severe liver injury associated with the use of kava-containing dietary supplements. Kava (*Piper methysticum*) is a plant indigenous to the islands in the South Pacific where it is commonly used to prepare a traditional beverage. Supplements containing the herbal ingredient kava are promoted for relaxation (e.g., to relieve stress, anxiety, and tension), sleeplessness, menopausal symptoms and other uses. FDA has not made a determination about the ability of kava dietary supplements to provide such benefits.

Liver-related risks associated with the use of kava have prompted regulatory agencies in other countries, including those in Germany, Switzerland, France, Canada, and the United Kingdom, to take action ranging from warning consumers about the potential risks of kava use to removing kava-containing

products from the marketplace. Although liver damage appears to be rare, FDA believes consumers should be informed of this potential risk.

Kava-containing products have been associated with liver-related injuries – including hepatitis, cirrhosis, and liver failure -- in over 25 reports of adverse events in other countries. Four patients required liver transplants. In the U.S., FDA has received a report of a previously healthy young female who required liver transplantation, as well as several reports of liver-related injuries.

Given these reports, persons who have liver disease or liver problems, or persons who are taking drug products that can affect the liver, should consult a physician before using kava-containing supplements.

Consumers who use a kava-containing dietary supplement and who experience signs of illness associated with liver disease should also consult their physician. Symptoms of serious liver disease include jaundice (yellowing of the skin or whites of the eyes) and brown urine. Non-specific symptoms of liver disease can include nausea, vomiting, light-colored stools, unusual tiredness, weakness, stomach or abdominal pain, and loss of appetite.

The presence of kava in a supplement should be identified on the product label in the "Supplement Facts" box. The following are commonly used names for kava:

- ava
- ava pepper
- awa
- intoxicating pepper
- kava
- kava kava
- kava pepper
- kava root
- kava-kava
- kawa
- kawa kawa
- kawa-kawa
- kew
- *Piper methysticum*
- *Piper methysticum* Forst.f.
- *Piper methysticum* G. Forst.
- rauschpfeffer
- sakau
- tonga
- wurzelstock
- yangona

FDA will continue to investigate the relationship, if any, between the use of dietary supplements containing kava and liver injury. The agency's investigation includes attempting to determine a biological explanation for the relationship and to identify the different sources of kava in the U.S. and Europe. The agency will alert consumers, and if warranted, take additional action as more information becomes available.

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