

Khat

Profile

Khat, pronounced “cot,” is a highly addictive drug categorized as a stimulant that creates feelings of euphoria. Khat originates from the *Catha Edulis* shrub, which grows abundantly in parts of East Africa and the Arabian Peninsula. Cathine, a Schedule IV drug, and Cathinone, a Schedule I drug, are khat’s two active ingredients. The khat leaves dry within 48 hours after the plant has been cut, lessening the stimulatory effect produced by cathinone by converting it into cathine, which has a much weaker effect.¹

History

Although khat is legal in certain parts of Europe, East Africa, and the Arabian Peninsula, it is illegal in the United States.² A recreational and religious drug used commonly by natives of the source countries, khat can be found in many social environments. During the celebration of Ramadan, khat use is very popular to relieve fatigue and reduce appetite. In certain social environments, khat is used in place of alcohol. According to Arab journals from the 13th century, physicians have used khat to treat depression and lack of energy. Peasants in certain cultures who worked long hours also used this stimulant.³ In countries where khat grows abundantly, the drug is found to be a large part of that country’s economy. In Ethiopia, for example, khat is the fourth largest export. After being cut from a 10 to 20 ft. tall flowering evergreen shrub, khat leaves are bundled in plastic bags or banana leaves so the moisture and freshness of the active ingredients in the plant are retained as it is smuggled into the United States or any other countries.⁴

Methods of Use

Khat is taken orally as a tea, chewed into a paste, smoked, or sprinkled on food. The leaves, twigs, and shoots of the khat shrub are most commonly chewed and stored in the cheek. The stimulant effect of khat is most effective when the leaves are still fresh.⁵ In fact, within 48 hours of cutting the plant, khat will begin to lose the potency of cathinone.⁶

Effects on the Brain

The effect of khat on the brain and spinal cord is similar to that of amphetamines, which are stimulated through synapses. Fatigue is alleviated, appetite is reduced, attention span is decreased, and levels of alertness and motor activity are increased.⁷ Users can quickly develop a psychological dependency to the drug, which increases their confidence, friendliness, and contentment. Hallucinations, grandiose delusions, and paranoia have also been noted as side effects of using khat.⁸ The cathinone found in the drug affects the central nervous system, causing an excess amount of dopamine to be produced. High accumulation of dopamine in the brain can cause hallucinations, schizophrenia, and high blood pressure.⁹

Short-Term Effects

- Insomnia
- Physical exhaustion
- Hallucinations, manic behavior, and hyperactivity¹⁰
- Mild euphoria and excitement
- Increased alertness and concentration
- Increased motor activity¹¹
- Irritability
- Breathing difficulties
- Constipation
- Tachycardia (elevated heart rate)¹²

Long-Term Effects

- Anorexia
- Gastric disorders
- Depression
- Tachycardia (elevated heart rate)
- Hypertension
- Insomnia¹³
- Increased risk for heart attacks, heart disease and cancer of the mouth
- Liver damage¹⁴

Addiction, Tolerance, and Withdrawal

There is no specific physical addiction to khat; however, there is a psychological dependence. Regular users of khat can develop a psychological dependency to the drug. Signs of withdrawal include minor laziness, mild depression, nightmares, and slight tremor.¹⁵ Consistent usage can increase the risk for psychological dependence that is moderate but persistent.

Terminology

- Kat
- Oat
- Jat¹⁶
- Chat
- Qat
- Cat
- Qaad
- Jaad
- Miraa
- Mairungi
- Catha

- Gat¹⁷
- Abbyssinian tea
- African salad
- Tohai
- Tschat¹⁸

Links

- [Street Drugs: Khat](#)
- [DEA: Khat](#)
- [National Drug Intelligence Center: Intelligence Bulletin - Khat](#)

¹ Street Drugs: Khat. Retrieved October 23, 2006, from <http://www.streetdrugs.org/khat.htm>.

² DEA: Khat. Retrieved October 23, 2006, from <http://www.dea.gov/concern/khat.html>.

³ DrugScope: Khat. (2004, January). Retrieved October 23, 2006, from http://www.drugscope.org.uk/st_info.asp?file=\wip\11\1\1\khat.html.

⁴ DEA: Khat; Crenshaw, M. Justin. (2004, August). "Khat: A Potential Concern for Law Enforcement." *The FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*. Retrieved October 23, 2006, from http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2194/is_8_73/ai_n6232021.

⁵ Partnership for a Drug-Free America Drug Guide: Khat. Retrieved October 23, 2006, from http://www.drugfree.org/Portal/drug_guide/Khat.

⁶ Crenshaw, M. Justin.

⁷ DrugInfo Clearinghouse (Australian Drug Foundation). "Khat Fact Sheet – For Workers." Retrieved October 23, 2006, from <http://www.druginfo.adf.org.au/article.asp?ContentID=khat>.

⁸ National Drug Intelligence Center. (2003, May). "Intelligence Bulletin: Khat (*Catha edulis*)." Retrieved October 23, 2006, from <http://www.justice.gov/ndic/pubs3/3920/3920t.htm>.

⁹ Crenshaw, M. Justin. (2004, August).

¹⁰ DEA: Khat.

¹¹ DrugInfo Clearinghouse (ADF).

¹² Cox, Glenice and Rapses, Hagen. (2003). "Adverse Effects of Khat: A Review." *Advances in Psychiatric Treatment* 9:456-463. Retrieved October 23, 2006, from <http://apt.rcpsych.org/cgi/reprint/9/6/456.pdf>.

¹³ DEA: Khat.

¹⁴ Medical News Today. (2006, May 27). "Khat Chewing Increases Risk of Heart Attack, Warn Doctors." Retrieved October 23, 2006, from <http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/medicalnews.php?newsid=44133>.

¹⁵ Crenshaw, M. Justin. (2004, August).

¹⁶ Crenshaw, M. Justin. (2004, August).

¹⁷ Cox, Glenice and Rapses, Hagen. (2003).

¹⁸ DrugInfo Clearinghouse (ADF).