

## What is khat?

Khat (*Catha edulis*) is a flowering shrub native to northeast Africa and the Arabian Peninsula. Individuals chew khat leaves because of the stimulant effects, which are similar to but less intense than those caused by abusing cocaine or methamphetamine.

## What does khat look like?

When fresh, khat leaves are glossy and crimson-brown in color, resembling withered basil. Khat leaves typically begin to deteriorate 48 hours after being cut from the shrub on which they grow. Deteriorating khat leaves are leathery and turn yellow-green in color.



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## How is khat used?

Khat typically is ingested by chewing the leaves—as is done with loose tobacco. Dried khat leaves can be brewed in tea or cooked and added to food. After ingesting khat, the user experiences an immediate increase in blood pressure and heart rate. The effects of the drug generally begin to subside between 90 minutes and 3 hours after ingestion; however, they can last up to 24 hours.

## Who uses khat?

The use of khat is accepted within the Somali, Ethiopian, and Yemeni cultures, and in the United States khat use is most prevalent among immigrants from those countries. Abuse levels are highest in cities with sizable populations of immigrants from Somalia, Ethiopia, and Yemen, including Boston, Columbus, Dallas, Detroit, Kansas City, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, Nashville, New York, and Washington, D.C. In addition, there is evidence to suggest that some nonimmigrants in these areas have begun abusing the drug.

## What are the risks?

Individuals who abuse khat typically experience a state of mild depression following periods of prolonged use. Taken in excess khat causes extreme thirst, hyperactivity, insomnia, and loss of appetite (which can lead to anorexia).

Frequent khat use often leads to decreased productivity because the drug tends to reduce the user's motivation. Repeated use can cause manic behavior with grandiose delusions, paranoia, and hallucinations. (There have been reports of khat-induced psychosis.) The drug also can cause damage to the nervous, respiratory, circulatory, and digestive systems.

### Street Terms for Khat

Abyssinian tea	Miraa
African salad	Oat
Bushman's tea	Qat
Chat	Somali tea
Gat	Tohai
Kat	Tschat

## Is khat illegal?

Yes, khat is illegal. Fresh khat leaves contain cathinone—a Schedule I drug under the Controlled Substances Act. Schedule I drugs, which include heroin and LSD, have a high potential for abuse and serve no legitimate medical purpose. When khat leaves are no longer fresh (typically after 48 hours), their chemical composition breaks down. At that point the leaves contain cathine, a Schedule IV substance. Schedule IV drugs are considered to have a lower potential for abuse but still can lead to limited physical or psychological dependence.

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## Questions and Answers



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