

KAVA (*PIPER METHYSTICUM*)



Piper methysticum, or **Kava** is a shrub native to Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia³. **Kava extract** comes from the rhizome of the plant². This supplement is commonly used for anxiety or as a sedative⁴.

A study of a community of Chinese immigrant patients in the U.S. reported that 98% of this population used some form of traditional Chinese medicine¹. Kava is a top-selling supplement in the U.S.²

SAFETY: Generally, kava has a low incidence of side effects⁵. However, it can lead to rare cases of skin reactions or liver problems⁵. In 2002 the FDA issued an advisory warning consumers of possible liver toxicity based on rare but severe cases involving use of supplements containing kava⁷. Kava supplements should be taken for only a short term (up to 24 weeks)².



KAVALACTONES

The extract from the rhizome contains kavalactones that affect the nervous system and neurotransmitters⁵.

DOSAGE:

50-70 mg of kavalactones two to four times daily⁵

DO NOT USE KAVA SUPPLEMENTS IF:

- Pregnant⁴
- Breastfeeding⁴
- Depressed
- Have liver disease⁴

DRUG/NUTRIENT INTERACTIONS:

Kava may have synergistic interactions with CNS depressants⁶, alcohol, and psychopharmacological agents⁵. Kava may have antagonistic interactions with dopamine agonists and antagonists⁶. Combining kava with antidepressants, antiplatelets, CYP-450 metabolized agents, or sedatives could lead to coma, sedation, lethargy or drowsiness⁶.

1. Wu AP, Burke A, LeBaron S. Use of traditional medicine by immigrant Chinese patients. *Fam Med*. 2007;39(3):195-200.

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3. LaPorte E, Sarris J, Slough C, Scholey A. Neurocognitive effects of kava (*Piper methysticum*): a systematic review. *Hum Psychopharmacol*. 2011;26(2):102-111.

4. Thai H. Chinese and Western Herbal Medicine: A Guide to Potential Risks and Drug Interactions. 2004; <http://ethnomed.org/clinical/pharmacy/herb-drug-interactions>. Accessed September 13, 2013.

5. Billa AR, Gallon S, Vincieri FF. Kava-kava and anxiety: growing knowledge about the efficacy and safety. *Life Sci*. 2002;70(22):2581-2597.

6. Posadzki P, Watson L, Ernst E. Herb-drug interactions: an overview of systematic reviews. *Br J Clin Pharmacol*. 2013;75(3):603-618.

7. US Food and Drug Administration. Consumer Advisory: Kava-Containing Dietary Supplements May be Associated with Severe Liver Injury. *Safety Alerts and Advisories* 2002; <http://www.fda.gov/Food/RecallsOutbreaksEmergencies/SafetyAlertsAdvisories/ucm085482.htm>. Accessed September 14, 2013, 2013.

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