Kava (Piper methysticum)

Piper methysticum, or Kava, is a shrub native to Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia. Kava extract comes from the rhizome of the plant. This supplement is commonly used for anxiety or as a sedative.

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 medicine. Kava is a top-selling supplement in the U.S.

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

Drug/Nutrient Interactions: Kava may have synergistic interactions with CNS depressants, alcohol, and psychopharmacological agents. Kava may have antagonistic interactions with dopamine agonists and antagonists. Combining kava with antidepressants, antiplatelets, CYP-450 metabolized agents, or sedatives could lead to coma, sedation, lethargy or drowsiness.

Kavalactones

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

Dosage: 50-70 mg of kavalactones two to four times daily.

Do not use Kava supplements if:
- Pregnant
- Breastfeeding
- Depressed
- Have liver disease