

Kava Kava

Latin name: *Piper methysticum*

Family: Piperaceae

Miscellaneous:

- Pacific Island people ritually prepared this drink by chewing cut pieces of the root (as to release the active constituents) and spitting them into a bowl. An infusion was then concocted via addition of coconut milk.¹
- Has a putrid taste, hence, it must be drunk quickly.
- Chewing/drinking of fresh herb will cause immediate numbing sensation in the mouth, similar to local anesthesia.

Uses:

Anxiolytic, hypnotic. A relaxed, sociable state will follow consumption. German Commission E has approved kava to treat anxiety, stress, and restlessness.¹

Mechanism:

Exact MOA is unknown. Compounds responsible for therapeutic effects, however, have been identified as kava lactones. Kava lactones produce similar actions pharmacologically to those of the benzodiazepine family, and are responsible for the CNS activity. Unlike benzodiazepines, however, kava does not cause impaired mental reaction time or depressed cognitive function.

Dosage:

Sedative = 180-210 mg approx. 1 hour before bedtime

Anxiolytic/Stress = 70 mg 2-3 times/day

*Kava should not be consumed for more than 3 months continuously.

Contraindications/Side effects:

Pregnancy/breastfeeding, caution when driving, lowered libido. Kava should not be simultaneously consumed with alcohol or CNS depressants due to potentiation of kava effects. A serious drug interaction has been reported between kava and alprazolam (benzodiazepine).¹

Citation References:

1. Tyler, V., Robbers, J.: *Tyler's Herbs of Choice: The Therapeutic Use of Phytomedicinals*: 1999, pp. 157-159.

General References:

1. Tyler, V., Robbers, J.: *Tyler's Herbs of Choice: The Therapeutic Use of Phytomedicinals*: 1999, pp. 157-159.
2. Duke, J.: *Dr. Duke's Essential Herbs*: 1999, pp. 171-184.
3. Pierce, A., The American Pharmaceutical Association: *Practical Guide to Natural Medicines*: 1999, pp. 373-375.
4. Karch, S.: *The Consumer's Guide to Herbal Medicine*: 1999, pp. 118-120.
5. McGuffin, M., Hobbs, C., Upton, R., Goldberg, A.: *American Herbal Products Association's Botanical Safety Handbook*: 1997, pp. 86-87.
6. Facts And Comparisons: *Guide To Popular Natural Products*: 1999, pp. 132-133.