

KHAT

Street Names

African Tea, Catha, Chat, Cot, Kat, Quate, Qat, Qaadka, Tohai.

Description

Khat is a green-leafed plant that is chewed or brewed as a tea. 'Cathinome', is the psychoactive ingredient in Khat and is present up to 48 hours after the leaves are harvested.

Routes of Use

Oral.

History

Khat has been used by people who live in the horn of Africa and Arabian Peninsula for centuries (it was mentioned in an Arab manuscript in 1333). The stimulant effect means that farmers who worked long hours used it to boost their energy levels. Doctors would prescribe it to treat depression. In some Muslim countries (where alcohol is banned) Khat is commonly used in social situations but is often condemned on religious grounds. Through refugees and emigrants from countries such as Somalia, Ethiopia and the Yemen it has recently emerged in the UK.

Effects People Seek

Fresh Khat leaves are chewed or made into a tea. Chewing Khat produces an euphoric effect similar to cocaine but is a lot less powerful. It is also used to heighten energy levels. When it is chewed on a regular basis it will cause the user to become very thirsty. For people who use it on a regular basis it can lead to mental health problems such as paranoia and depression, it also causes irritability and insomnia. Users claim that Khat eases symptoms of diabetes, asthma and intestinal tract disorders although there is little factual evidence of this.

Other Effects

Because it is chewed, infections in the mouth and digestive system are common in Khat users. There is also evidence to suggest that excessive use can lead to other health problems such as heart disease and oral cancer.

Dependence & Tolerance

Psychological dependence can result from regular use so that, users feel anxious, low and sometimes violent until they use it again.

The Law

The laws on Khat vary around the world, but within the UK it is not covered by The Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 so it is legal to sell or use. There have been calls from groups within communities to ban the use of Khat and these are being discussed. It is a controlled drug in other countries including the Republic of Ireland, USA, Sweden, Norway and Canada (to name a few) so UK residents who travel to these countries with Khat would be breaking the law.