EMERGING SUBSTANCES ON CAMPUS

Kratom & 7-OH

Sold as natural, legal, and sober-friendly in smoke shops, gas stations, kava bars, and online.

What collegiate recovery professionals need to know, and what to ask.

PLANT-BASED ≠ SAFE | NOT ON STANDARD DRUG SCREENS | MARKETED TO STUDENTS | FREE GROUP · TUESDAYS

169%
increase in kratom admissions at Mountainside, 2024 to 2025

41%
of surveyed users took kratom for opioid dependence

13–22×
more potent than morphine, per emerging reports on some 7-OH products

30%
of kava poison center exposures also involved kratom

WHAT IS KRATOM?

Mitragyna speciosa, a tree in the coffee family native to Thailand, Indonesia, and Malaysia. Its active alkaloids, mitragynine and 7-hydroxymitragynine (7-OH), act on the brain's opioid receptors.

THEN

- Leaves chewed or brewed as tea
- Used by laborers for stamina and pain relief
- Low, slow-absorbing doses

NOW

- Powders, capsules, shots, gummies, vapes
- Concentrated extracts
- High-potency 7-OH and semi-synthetic products

THE DOSE CHANGES THE DRUG

Low dose 1–5 g	Acts as a **stimulant**: more alertness, energy, and sociability.
Higher dose 5–15+ g	Acts as a **sedative and opioid**: pain relief, calm, sometimes euphoria.

Concentrated extracts make it easy to skip past the mild stimulant range straight to a high, opioid-like dose.

Real consequences. A Florida family was awarded $11 million after a woman died of acute kratom intoxication from a product called "Space Dust." In 2025, Botanic Tonics settled an $8.75 million class action over claims its kratom drinks were safe and non-addictive.

WHY IT MATTERS FOR COLLEGIATE RECOVERY

- **Sold as safe.** Kratom tonics were handed out on campuses as study aids and alcohol alternatives.
- **Used to self-manage recovery.** Many people use it to self-manage opioid withdrawal, which raises real questions about what counts as sobriety.
- **Easy to miss.** Standard 5- and 10-panel urine screens do not detect it.
- **Hidden in "sober" spaces.** Kava bars market alcohol-free socializing, and some also serve kratom.

7-OH: NOT TRADITIONAL KRATOM

- Natural kratom has only trace 7-OH. Concentrated and semi-synthetic 7-OH products are now widely sold, sometimes simply labeled "kratom."
- Sold as gummies, tablets, drinks, extracts, and pressed pills that can look like candy, supplements, or snacks.
- Commercial products are unregulated. Some have tested positive for heavy metals, *Salmonella*, or stronger synthetic opioids.
- Frequent high-dose use leads to dependence and withdrawal similar to prescription opioids.

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Laura Maguire
VP of Educational Partnerships
Laura.Maguire@mountainside.com

TESTING: WHAT A STANDARD SCREEN MISSES

Standard urine tox panel	Kratom-specific lab test
Does not typically test for kratom	Tests for mitragynine, sometimes 7-OH
A negative result does not rule out use	Can confirm recent exposure
Not part of federal workplace panels	Must be specifically ordered (LC-MS/MS)

IF SOMEONE MAY BE OVERDOSING

Give Narcan anyway, call 911, and give rescue breathing if trained. Naloxone is safe even without opioids present.

KRATOM ALONE

Response is variable. Narcan may partly help slowed breathing, or have little effect.

MIXED OR 7-OH

With opioids, other depressants, or high-potency 7-OH, Narcan is most effective.

LEGAL STATUS IS SHIFTING FAST

- **Banned in 9 states:** AL, AR, CT, IN, KS, LA, TN, VT, WI. Kansas and Tennessee bans took effect July 1, 2026; Kentucky's is expected in 2027.
- **Federal:** In July 2026 the DEA moved to temporarily place concentrated 7-OH in Schedule I. As of October 2026 that order was still pending. The FDA has issued warnings and import bans. Check your state's current rules.

FIVE QUESTIONS TO ASK

> *"Have you used any herbal supplements, kratom, or botanical products?"*

> *"Do you use kratom regularly, or have you found it hard to cut down?"*

> *"What form do you use: powder, capsules, drinks, or extracts?"*

> *"Have you had withdrawal symptoms when you stopped, like anxiety, sweating, or muscle aches?"*

> *"Are you using kratom to manage pain, anxiety, opioid withdrawal, or other symptoms?"*

KAVA BARS: ASK WHAT'S IN IT

Kava (*Piper methysticum*) is a South Pacific root used for relaxation. Bars sell traditional drinks, kava extracts, kratom, or both. Both can cause sedation, dizziness, poor coordination, and slowed breathing at higher doses, and combining them may add to those depressant effects.

THE AI MISINFORMATION GAP

Nearly 30% of adults turn to AI chatbots for health information and rarely check it with a professional. AI answers about kratom often draw on unverified sources. A 19-year-old California student died after combining kratom, alcohol, and Xanax; his parents allege ChatGPT advised him on the combination.

FREE · OPEN TO THE PUBLIC · TUESDAYS AT 7 PM

Kratom Support Group

Clinician-led education and peer support for individuals, families, and clinicians navigating kratom use, dependence, and withdrawal. Scan to join.

- Use vs. misuse and patterns of use
- Short- and long-term effects
- What kratom gives vs. takes away
- Mood, motivation, and relationships
- Withdrawal and treatment options
- Connection and peer support

LEARN MORE

- Bloomberg: *The Growing Toll of America's Booming Kratom Industry* (video)
- NPR 1A: *Florida's Unregulated Kratom Market*
- NYT: *What You Should Know About the Potential Risks of Kratom*

SUPPORT

- Kratom Anonymous: kratomanonymous.com
- *Kratom Sobriety Podcast*: kratomsobriety.podbean.com
- Quitting Kratom support meetings

Sources: Mountainside admissions data; Johns Hopkins kratom survey (2020; 2025); CDC MMWR (2025, 2026); Missouri DHSS (2026); ClassAction.org (2026); NBC News (2023); Medical Economics (2026); Yale Law School (2026); DEA (2026); state legislatures. Content adapted from "Kratom, Kava & Ketamine: Emerging Substances on Campus," presented by Jana Wu, LCSW, LADC, Director of Clinical Integration, Mountainside. This handout is educational and not medical advice.

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Laura Maguire
VP of Educational Partnerships
Laura.Maguire@mountainside.com