Kava Encyclopedia Article

Kava

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Kava

Kava is a beverage prepared from the root of the pepper shrub *Piper methysticum,* native to Asia, Australia, and islands in the region. The drink is called *kava,* Polynesian for bitter or pungent, because of its strong peppery taste. Several variations of this drink were once commonly used for social occasions as **intoxicants** in the islands of the South Pacific, especially Fiji.

Common effects of kava include muscle relaxation, euphoria—a feeling of intense well-being—and reduced fatigue. It also has effects on seeing and hearing. In large quantities kava can lead to a loss of muscular coordination and **stupor**. Since the mid-1990s, kava has gained popularity as an herbal supplement, along with remedies such as St. John's Wort and ginkgo biloba. Millions of people take kava, which can be purchased without a prescription, under the belief that it relieves stress and sleeplessness.

In the United States, herbal supplements like kava are considered neither food nor drugs. As such, they may be sold without the evaluation and approval of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. In between 2000 and 2001, there were reports of a link between high doses of kava use and liver failure. As of March 2002, the FDA advised consumers to consult their healthcare providers before taking kava or preparations that contain kava until further study determines a safe dose. In particular, people with liver problems or who are taking other medications should consult with their healthcare provider before using kava.

See Also

Drugs Used in Rituals; Drug Use Around the World.