

has been harvested. Khat samples in which any level of cathinone is found by chemical analysis are treated as Schedule I plant material. Khat samples in which only cathine is detectable by chemical analysis are treated as Schedule IV plant material.

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# Khat Fast Facts



## Questions and Answers



**National Drug Intelligence Center**  
a component of the  
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## What is khat?

Khat (*Catha edulis*) is a flowering shrub native to East Africa and the Arabian Peninsula. The term khat refers to the leaves and young shoots of *Catha edulis*. The plant has been widely used since the thirteenth century as a recreational drug by the indigenous people of East Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, and the Middle East. Individuals chew khat leaves because of their stimulant and euphoric effects, which are similar to, but less intense than, those resulting from the abuse of cocaine or methamphetamine.

## What does khat look like?

When fresh, khat leaves are glossy and crimson-brown in color, resembling withered basil. Khat leaves typically begin to deteriorate 48 hours after being harvested from the shrub on which they grow. Deteriorating khat leaves are leathery and turn yellow-green.



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## How is khat used?

Fresh khat typically is chewed and then retained in the cheek and chewed intermittently until the juices are extracted. Dried khat can be brewed into tea or made into a chewable paste. Less common methods of administering khat are smoking or sprinkling on food. Immediate effects of khat use include increased heart and breathing rates, elevated body temperature and blood pressure, and increased alertness, excitement, energy, and talkativeness. The effects of khat usually last between 90 minutes and 3 hours. After-effects of khat use include lack of concentration, numbness, and insomnia.

## Who uses khat?

The use of khat is accepted within Somali, Ethiopian, and Yemeni cultures; in the United States, khat use is most prevalent among immigrants from those countries. Abuse levels are highest in cities with sizable immigrant populations from Somalia, Ethiopia, and Yemen, such as Boston, Columbus, Dallas, Detroit, Kansas City, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, Nashville, New York City, and Washington, D.C.

### Street Terms for Khat

Abyssinian tea	Miraa
African salad	Oat
Bushman's tea	Qat
Chat	Somali tea
Gat	Tohai
Graba	Tschat
Kat	

## What are the risks?

Khat abuse causes psychological dependence, and chronic abuse can lead to behavioral changes and mental health impairment. Clinical symptoms include manic behavior with grandiose delusions, violence, suicidal depression, and schizophreniform psychosis characterized by paranoid delusions. Chronic abuse can also produce physical exhaustion, anorexia, periodontal disease, and gastrointestinal illness.

## Is khat illegal?

There is no licit use for khat in the United States. Khat contains two central nervous system stimulants: cathinone—a Schedule I drug<sup>1</sup> under the Federal Controlled Substances Act—and cathine—a Schedule IV drug.<sup>2</sup> Cathinone is the principal active stimulant; its levels are highest in fresh khat. Once the plant is harvested, cathinone levels begin to decline; cooling the cut plant material reduces the rate of decline. In dried or dehydrated khat, also known as Graba, cathinone may be detected for many months or even years. Cathine, which is about 10 times less potent than cathinone, remains stable in khat after the plant

1. Schedule I drugs under the Controlled Substances Act (CSA) are classified as having a high potential for abuse, no currently accepted medical use in the United States, and a lack of accepted safety for use of the drug under medical supervision.

2. Schedule IV drugs under the CSA are classified as having a low potential for abuse relative to the drugs or other substances in Schedule III, a currently accepted medical use in the United States, and abuse of the drug may lead to limited physical dependence or psychological dependence relative to the drugs or other substances in Schedule III.