

Can Kava Kava Products Cause Liver Damage?

FDA investigates possible adverse effects of popular herb on liver.

The FDA recently issued an official letter to health care professionals about dietary supplements containing Kava kava. They are looking at whether there may be cases of liver toxicity associated with the popular dietary supplement in the U.S.

Approximately 25 reports of liver damage have been associated with the use of products containing Kava in Germany and Switzerland, and products with the herb have already been pulled from the shelves in several places in Europe. However, whether the herb, the manufacturing process, the supplement product itself, or the dosing is implicated is still under investigation. Because of the potentially serious nature of the concern, the FDA asks health professionals to report any cases of liver damage that may be related to use of the herb.

Kava plants grow actively in the Pacific Islands and their roots are harvested for use in dietary supplements in the forms of capsules, liquids or teas. Kava kava is marketed to help relieve anxiety, stress and to induce sleep and relaxation. While there is some evidence of the sedative qualities of Kava, studies are conflicting and there is concern over possibly dangerous drug/supplement interactions.

Until there is more conclusive evidence about the herb, some companies are taking precautionary measures by stopping the sale of products containing Kava.

As with all medications, proper and appropriate dosing according to age, weight, and overall health is very important for all herbal supplements. Seeking advice from a trained health professional with expertise in herbal medicines is recommended.

Reference:

Food and Drug Administration. Internet site: www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/ds-ltr27.html. (January 2002).

Sarubin A. (2000). *The Health Professional's Guide to Popular Dietary Supplements*. USA: The American Dietetic Association.