

## Fact Sheet

**Khat**

**Aka:** Chat, Qat, Miraa, and numerous other names

**SOURCE:** Khat is one of the many names for the plant *Catha Edulis*. The plant is grown extensively in Sub-Saharan Africa, especially Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, The Yemen and Kenya. In addition to use in-country it is imported into the UK, and sold here or may be exported to other countries including the United States. The plant is openly sold in the UK, from street markets in London and other city centres.

**APPEARANCE:** Bundles of twigs, with leaves attached.

**COST:** £3-5 per bunch

**QUALITY:** Variable: Chat varies in strength, and its strength also deteriorates after the plant is picked.

**METHODS OF USE:** Khat is usually chewed. The leaves and soft pulp are placed in the mouth and masticated for a long period of time. Khat chewing is frequently treated as a social activity, taking place in small groups and lasting for several hours at a time.

Leaves can also be stewed and made in to a tea.

**EFFECTS:** The active constituents of khat are cathinone and cathine. These are stimulants and the effects are similar to those of amphetamines, but milder.. They increase energy, reduce appetite, and cause users to become talkative and animated, followed by drowsiness, sleep or depression.

Some users claim that they can enhance sexual arousal and performance.

**HEALTH IMPLICATIONS:** Excessive use can cause a range of symptoms including irritability, paranoia, insomnia and weight loss. Unless discontinued, it can, in extreme case, lead to psychosis. Frequent chewing can cause tooth and gum damage, and jaw problems. Chewing in unhygienic settings can lead to health problems.

**LEGAL STATUS:** Possession or use of Khat is not presently restricted in the UK. However, it is illegal in some other countries such as the USA and people are arrested and prosecuted for carrying the drug into other countries. Extracted cathinone is a Class C drug.

**OTHER INFORMATION:** Chat use is common in certain cultural settings, and has been practised for many centuries in certain areas of East Africa and the Arab Peninsula.

Use in-country is the source of much controversy and debate. Khat use has been a significant issue during armed conflict, increasing anxiety and energy amongst soldiers and used to embolden and desensitise child soldiers.

Khat use in the UK has been the subject of ACMD scrutiny who explored whether or not it should be made a controlled drug. This was in light of escalating and problematic UK use, especially amongst young Somali men. Whereas use of Khat had traditionally taken place in social settings and was often generally not sustained for long periods, young Somali khat users were reported to be chewing daily, for extended periods of time. Such heavy use brought with it higher levels of physical and psychological risk.

However the ACMD has, to date, declined to advocate adding Khat to the list of controlled drugs, fearing that to do so would drive the drug, and problems related to use, deeper underground.

Khat use has not been taken up beyond it's cultural users, and is not popular with other stimulant users.

Extracted cathinone cannot be sold, and whole-plant forms are not popular as a recreational drug.

Khat and cathinone should not be confused with Methcathinone, a synthetic stimulant produced from ephedrine. While both are stimulants, methcathinone has more in common with methamphetamine than khat.