

There is a critical scientific difference between whole-leaf kratom and the products being sold today as "7-hydroxymitragynine," or 7-OH.

Whole-leaf kratom is simply the dried leaf of *Mitragyna speciosa*. Its primary alkaloid is mitragynine. When someone consumes kratom, the human body naturally converts only a very small amount-typically well under one percent-into 7-OH through normal liver metabolism. This process is slow and self-limiting.

By contrast, the 7-OH products now appearing on the market contain laboratory-isolated or chemically converted 7-hydroxymitragynine in amounts far beyond what the human body could ever produce from kratom leaf. At those levels, 7-OH behaves much more like a conventional opioid and carries much higher risk.

When these high-potency 7-OH products are lumped with natural kratom, it leads to misleading risk assessments and poor public policy. Regulating or restricting 7-OH does not require banning whole-leaf kratom-and that distinction matters, because kratom saved my life.

From 2008 to 2019, I lived trapped in FDA-approved pain pills, benzodiazepines, and muscle relaxers prescribed for my degenerative disc disease. Over 11 years, chronic pain management turned into full-blown addiction. What began as dependency slowly became a cycle of misuse, desperation, and shame.

In April of 2019, I was dismissed from pain management after failing a required pill count. I was short on my medication and couldn't find what I needed. Cut off from prescriptions, I turned to the streets, and in that desperation, I slipped into cocaine use while trying to find another doctor.

By June of 2019, I was in withdrawal and at rock bottom when I watched a documentary called *A Leaf of Faith*. That moment changed everything. The next day, I walked into a shop, showed my ID, and bought whole-leaf kratom..not synthetic 7-OH.

Kratom quieted the relentless cravings. The voice that kept saying, "one more pill, one more snort, one more escape," finally went silent. For the first time in over a decade, I felt stable. Kratom gave me the breathing room to heal and allowed me to rebuild my life.

I have not returned to pain management in over six and a half years. Today, I am a thriving mother, a first-time grandmother, and a contributing member of society. I am no longer a burden to my children. I am an example of recovery.

I will always be grateful that I had access to safe, lab-tested, whole-leaf kratom. And that is why I speak out to protect others who are still fighting for their lives.

Misty Brown

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