

My name is Eddie Coto and I'm reaching out to tell you about my experience with kratom. I live in Spearfish, South Dakota and am 54 years old. I've taken whole leaf kratom for the last five years daily for my chronic back pain. I suffer from degenerative disc disease, scoliosis, and DISH, which calcifies the ligaments in my spine. These conditions are extremely painful.

I was previously prescribed muscle relaxers—which I still take occasionally—and pain medications ten years ago. Kratom has allowed me to continue working as I run a kitchen in Deadwood as a chef, working 12 hours a day, 6 days a week. Without it, I would likely be facing disability. It allows me to function with a clear head and operate without impairment of my motor skills or cognitive ability. It does not get me high or alter my judgment in any way.

I am currently recovering from a very painful shoulder surgery, and kratom has enabled me to reduce my need for prescription pain medication much sooner and with greater ease. Many people have shared stories about ending their addictions to hard drugs and opiates using kratom to completely stop their addictive behaviors.

I believe kratom is getting a bad image because of 7-OH. You may be aware that they are not the same—7-OH is synthetically produced and only exists in minute quantities in whole leaf kratom. In my state, kratom is now regulated by the Kratom Consumer Protection Act (KCPA), which requires proper labeling and age restrictions—regulations that I fully support. This is reasonable, safe legislation with clear guidelines.

7-OH is especially problematic because companies are not labeling or dispensing it properly, and many people have unknowingly taken it thinking it was kratom. I believe this synthetic product has muddied the waters, and a clear distinction needs to be made between 7-OH and whole leaf kratom. I have never taken 7-OH, as whole leaf kratom has worked very well for me on its own.

It is important to note that people now struggle to access proper pain medication, and kratom provides an effective alternative. While it can interact with some medications, claims that it causes direct fatalities are misrepresented—an example of hyperbole used to further certain agendas. Dr. Chris McCurdy, a leading scientist studying kratom, has discussed these medical findings and highlighted how they are misrepresented. Dr. Marilyn Huestis, a forensic toxicologist with 50 years of experience, states that there are no levels of kratom that can shut down the respiratory system or create toxicity.

I do not support a ban or legislation that limits kratom's use beyond what is outlined in the KCPA. Many of us depend on it for a variety of reasons. Not only does it help with pain, but it also improves my mood and allows me to function as a normal, pain-free person. It is similar to coffee in how it provides motivation and mental clarity.

As you know, truth welcomes discussion because it does not need to hide—it stands on its own merits. We welcome this discussion.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Eddie Coto

Advocate, Chronic Pain Patient, Chef, and Community Member