

Kratom Eye Wobbles: Oscillopsia and horizontal nystagmus in a patient with kratom toxicity

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INTRODUCTION

- Kratom is an herb extracted from the leaves of the *Mitragyna speciosa* tree, which is native to Southeast Asia.
- Although illegal in many countries, it remains widely available for purchase in the United States.
- Kratom is used for the treatment of opioid withdrawal, treatment of chronic pain, and for recreation ^{1,7}.
- The two active alkaloids, mitragynine and 7-hydroxymitragynine, have agonist activity at mu and kappa opioid, postsynaptic alpha-2 adrenergic, and serotonin receptors, amongst others ^{1,3}.
- The adverse effects of kratom include dry mouth, agitation, nausea, vomiting, constipation, confusion, hallucinations, and respiratory depression ^{2,7}.
- Although not commonly reported in medical literature, kratom can cause nystagmus⁷, known in colloquial terms as the “kratom eye wobbles”.
- Here we present a case of a woman presenting with presyncope, vision changes, and horizontal nystagmus on exam, who had toxic levels of kratom in her urine.

CASE

- A 51 year old female patient with a history of previous intravenous heroin abuse presented after a presyncopal episode at her primary care clinic.
- The patient described "wavy" vision and oscillopsia.
- On exam, she had bilateral horizontal nystagmus.
- The work up was comprehensive and unrevealing, and included orthostatic vital signs, vitamin B12/folate levels, EKG, TTE, chest x-ray, and brain MRI.
- On further discussion with the patient, she admitted she had been using kratom which she purchased on the internet to treat her opioid cravings.
- Her urine mitragynine level was greater than 500 ng/mL.

DISCUSSION

- Kratom use is increasing in the United States, and its accessibility on the internet makes it important for healthcare providers to know the signs and symptoms of kratom toxicity¹.
- Interestingly, the presence of nystagmus as a presenting sign of kratom toxicity is rarely reported in the medical literature ⁵; however, a Google search of “kratom nystagmus” yields a myriad of anecdotal reports of kratom users experiencing “the eye wobbles”.

CONCLUSION

- Healthcare providers should be aware that visual changes and nystagmus can be an important diagnostic clue into kratom toxicity.
- This case highlights how imperative it is for providers to obtain a comprehensive history of herbal supplement usage.

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