

In Ethiopia, a rehab centre takes on khat addiction

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Ethiopia's state-run Substance Rehabilitation Centre tackles khat usage, in a country where chewing the leafy stimulant is commonplace

Yonas Getu Molla started chewing khat as an architecture student, when he and his friends would munch on the leafy stimulant late into the night

to help them study.

When they closed their books, their heartbeats racing, they would seek out depressants like vodka and cannabis to dull the plant's amphetamine-like effects so they could sleep.

Yonas blames khat for leading him into drug and alcohol addictions, which cost him his career, his savings and the respect of his family.

"One substance would follow the other substance," he said. "It's like a coin—the back and the front."

At the state-run Substance Rehabilitation Centre, he has been forced to give up khat alongside his other addictions—a rare approach in a region where few are trying to tackle the controversial habit.

While banned in many countries, chewing khat is commonplace in Ethiopia and the wider Horn of Africa region.

Many see it as a cultural activity rather than a societal problem.

However, some users are frank about the side effects: loss of appetite, damaged teeth and lack of sleep.

The habit can also drain household finances. A user in the capital Addis Ababa would expect to pay around \$4 a day for khat from the eastern city of Harar, long a centre of production.

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