Habits and Safety Fatality File

He had no history of heart problems. He walked his dog regularly and worked a physically demanding job as a construction worker, according to his doctors.

Then, in January 2019, he collapsed at a McDonald’s and died.

The likely culprit? Black licorice, according to the doctors who treated him and who this week published their findings about the unusual case in The New England Journal of Medicine.

The report said the man, an unidentified 54-year-old from Massachusetts, had consumed one to two large bags of black licorice a day for three weeks. That **habit** caused his potassium levels to drop precipitously, prompting a cardiac arrest, according to the study. He never regained consciousness after his collapse and died about 24 hours after he arrived at Massachusetts General Hospital.

“We almost didn’t believe it when we figured it out,” said Dr. Jacqueline B. Henson, who treated the man while she was a resident at the hospital. “We were all shocked and surprised.”