



MSG and Aspartame Linked to Common Medical Complaints

By Gerard Guillory, M.D.

If you regularly experience severe headaches, dizziness, muscle aches and digestive discomfort, the cause may lie in your refrigerator, pantry or favorite restaurant.

Monosodium glutamate (MSG) and aspartame are two common food additives that, to my experience, are culprits in many medical complaints. Hundreds of my patients have eliminated these substances from their diets and are now feeling much better.

I have a long-standing interest in food intolerances and food sensitivities and a particular interest in the adverse health effects of neuroexcitatory amino acids. These include glutamic acid, which is found in MSG, and aspartic acid, which is found in aspartame (marketed commercially as NutraSweet).

Between 1994 and 1996, we performed a clinical trial in our office, with a grant from the Presbyterian/St. Luke's Foundation, to determine if MSG might be a trigger for irritable bowel syndrome (IBS). The results of our study suggested that some people experienced worsening of their digestive complaints when MSG was consumed.

Since, I have counseled hundreds of patients regarding avoidance of MSG and aspartame, with positive results. As one example, most of the patients I have seen who were experiencing migraine headaches eliminated these symptoms after receiving appropriate counseling on the avoidance of these dietary triggers.

The adverse effects of glutamic acid and aspartic acid go well beyond headache. Other side effects include impaired ability to concentrate, attention deficit disorder (ADD), dizziness, flushing, muscle aches, fatigue, digestive complaints and more.

The acids contained in MSG and aspartame are amino acids, which serve as building blocks for proteins in the body and also act as chemical messengers in the brain. It is no surprise, therefore, that the list of side effects reads like a list of adverse reactions to a medication that treats mood disorders.

Both aspartic acid and glutamic acid stimulate a receptor in the brain, the NMDA receptor. Namenda, a new drug that treats Alzheimer's disease, blocks the NMDA receptor. This suggests to me that overstimulation of the NMDA receptor by these food additives can't be good and, in fact, over time may lead to various neurodegenerative disorders. This begs the question: Are the same people who exhibit sensitivities today, manifested by symptoms such as migraine headache, likely later in life to develop Alzheimer's or some other neurodegenerative disorder such as Parkinson's? It is rumored

that Michael J. Fox, who developed Parkinson's disease early in life, consumed a large amount of diet soda, sweetened with aspartame.

One problem with MSG is that, although it is a known trigger for migraine headache and other symptoms in susceptible individuals, many other food additives contain MSG (see below) and the ingredients of these additives aren't always clearly stated.

MSG was originally discovered by the Japanese, who added seaweed to their food in order to enhance the flavor, without realizing that this process released glutamic acid, the substance that provided the flavoring. Although many people think of MSG in relation to Chinese food, the substance is found today in most commercially produced soups, salad dressings, seasoning mixes, frozen dinners and processed foods.

In the past, glutamic acid was obtained largely through a process called hydrolyzation, in which the acid is released from various proteins. Today, most of the free glutamic acid used in foods is manufactured through a fermentation process in which genetically altered bacteria synthesize glutamic acid.

How can you avoid MSG if it is so prevalent in our food? Let's focus on what you can eat. You can have fresh meats, including beef, pork, poultry and seafood, but avoid cured meats, deli meats and meats that have been treated with a "solution to enhance flavor." When buying packaged meat such as chicken, ensure that the label says "all natural and free of additives or preservatives," or words to that effect. Note that most frozen, boneless, skinless chicken breasts are treated with a "broth solution to enhance flavor."

Fresh fruits and vegetables are in the clear and, in most instances, frozen fruits and vegetables also are free of these substances; however, read the label to verify that nothing else has been added. When feasible, buy foods labeled "organic," which further limits the possibility of ingesting MSG and aspartame.

In restaurants, stay away from the soup, as the stocks usually contain MSG. Gravies and sauces often contain MSG, and "low-fat" and "no-fat" foods are typically loaded with MSG as manufacturers seek to replace the flavor that is lost when fat is reduced.

The bottom line: I am convinced that MSG and aspartame should be removed from the food supply. Not only might they cause a variety of troublesome symptoms, but they also may lead to chronic neurodegenerative disorders. Make a serious attempt to avoid these additives for a period of time and see if you don't feel better.

**Hidden Sources
of Processed Free Glutamic Acid
Ingredients that may contain sufficient MSG to trigger reactions**

From: www.truthinlabeling.org

*830 Potomac Circle • Suite 150 • Aurora, CO 80011
(303) 343-3121 FAX (303) 343-3514
www.thecaregroup.com*

The MSG reaction is a reaction to free glutamic acid that occurs in food as a consequence of manufacture. MSG-sensitive people do not react to protein (which contains bound glutamic acid) or any of the minute amounts of free glutamic acid that might be found in unadulterated, unfermented, food.

These ALWAYS contain MSG:

Glutamate	Glutamic acid	Gelatin
Monosodium glutamate	Calcium caseinate	Textured protein
Monopotassium glutamate	Sodium caseinate	Yeast nutrient
Yeast extract	Yeast food	Autolyzed yeast
Hydrolyzed protein (any protein that is hydrolyzed)	Hydrolyzed corn gluten	Natrium glutamate (natrium is Latin/German for sodium)

These OFTEN contain MSG or create MSG during processing:

Carrageenan	Maltodextrin	Malt extract
Natural pork flavoring	Citric acid	Malt flavoring
Bouillon and Broth	Natural chicken flavoring	Soy protein isolate
Natural beef flavoring	Ultra-pasteurized	Soy sauce
Stock	Barley malt	Soy sauce extract
Whey protein concentrate	Pectin	Soy protein
Whey protein	Protease	Soy protein concentrate
Whey protein isolate	Protease enzymes	Anything protein fortified
Flavors(s) & Flavoring(s)	Anything enzyme modified	Anything fermented
Natural flavor(s) and flavoring(s)	Enzymes anything	Seasonings (the word "seasonings")

Gerard L. Guillory, M.D., is board-certified in internal medicine and has been practicing in Aurora, Colo., since July 1985. As an assistant clinical professor of medicine at the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center, Dr. Guillory is actively involved in teaching medical students, resident physicians, and nurse practitioner students. He has lectured extensively on the role of nutrition and disease. Over the years, he has fostered an interest in patient education and has authored three books on digestive troubles. He also has served as medical director of a Colorado-based health plan and as a health consultant to employer groups.