

THE GLUTAMATE

ASSOCIATION

UNITED STATES

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International Symposium Supports Safety and Benefits of MSG **Journal of Nutrition Supplement Publishes Research Results**

WASHINGTON (March 28, 2000) – Scientific research continues to mount supporting the safety and benefits of monosodium glutamate (MSG). Proceedings from the International Symposium on Glutamate held in October 1998 in Bergamo, Italy, published in a supplement to the April *Journal of Nutrition*, includes key research reaffirming the general safety of MSG and its beneficial flavor-enhancing properties.

During the symposium, researchers from across the globe presented more than 37 studies about glutamate and its function in the body.

"Data presented underscored the important role glutamate plays in maintaining crucial body functions; for example, serving as an energy source in body organs such as the gastrointestinal tract and liver, its crucial role in nerve cell operation, and its role in taste sensation," said John Fernstrom, University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, and editor of the symposium proceedings. "The sum of the research at the symposium on glutamate, and in other studies, supports the safety of MSG."

The Benefits of Taste: Improving Diets of the Elderly

Dr. Susan Schiffman from Duke University's Medical Center shared data that showed the impact of taste and smell losses in the elderly, leading to inadequate dietary intake. Schiffman and colleagues showed that enhancing the flavor of foods with MSG can improve food palatability and acceptance, thus improving the quality of food intake in the elderly.

Glutamate: Fuel for the Body

While previous research has shown that the human body metabolizes glutamate in the same fashion, whether it's added to foods or found naturally in many foods, new research helps explain why large doses of dietary glutamate do not result in large increases in the level of glutamate circulating in the blood. A research team led by Peter Reeds, in conjunction with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, has discovered that dietary glutamate serves as an important energy source for the gut. Reeds demonstrated that more than 95 percent of dietary glutamate is used as an energy source in piglets. Because dietary glutamate is rapidly metabolized by the gut as an energy source, large doses of MSG and other glutamates would not be expected to enter the blood stream to any appreciable degree.

Other studies presented at the conference corroborated these findings. For example, a group of researchers from National Taiwan University observed plasma levels of glutamate following the consumption of large dietary sources of MSG in meals. The researchers conclude that the rather low plasma glutamate concentrations over the 24-hour period, despite the high intake of MSG, "indicate that dietary MSG is metabolized very rapidly."

Safety of MSG Reaffirmed

The food industry has safely used MSG as a flavor enhancer since the early 1900s, and the data presented at the symposium continued to support the U.S. Food & Drug Administration's determination that MSG is safe for the general population.

Two leading researchers from the Scripps Research Institute presented data showing no link between MSG consumption and allergic reactions, including asthma and hives. Dr. Donald Stevenson, Division of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology at the Scripps Clinic and the Scripps Research Institute, reviewed data regarding MSG and the potential for asthma. After examining all available data, Stevenson concluded, "The existence of MSG-induced asthma, even in history-positive patients has not been established conclusively."

Dr. Ronald Simon presented research that examined the potential connection between MSG consumption and the exacerbation, or development of, hives or urticaria. In a double-blind placebo controlled study, Simon and his colleagues examined 65 individuals, all of whom had urticaria for six weeks without any apparent cause and were given up to 2500 mg. of MSG.

At the conclusion of their study, Simon stated, "They were unable to demonstrate MSG-induced urticaria in any of the chronic patients, even those who believed MSG provoked their urticaria in the past."

A study conducted by researchers at Mahidol University in Thailand evaluated the blood glutamate levels in users and nonusers of MSG. The researchers found no statistical difference in glutamate plasma levels between these two groups and conclude that these findings "indicate that long-term intake of MSG is not associated with chronic elevation of fasting plasma glutamate concentrations."

Finally, research from Harvard University, Northwestern University, and the University of California-Los Angeles, found symptoms attributed to MSG are not reproducible in double-blind testing. In a multi-center, multi-phased study, researchers noted that "Neither epidemiologic surveys nor challenge studies provide evidence that ingestion of MSG is associated with adverse reactions in the population at large."

The supplement to the *Journal of Nutrition* contains these and other articles (35 articles in total) that report on the research that has been conducted in the past 20 years on glutamate. The International Symposium on Glutamate was sponsored by the following renowned organizations: the Mario Negri Institute for Pharmacological Research, the Baylor College of Medicine, the Center for Nutrition of the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, the Monell Chemical Senses Center, the International Union of Food Science and Technology, and the International Glutamate Technical Committee.

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The Glutamate Association seeks to provide an effective channel of communication among its members, the public, the media, the scientific community, food professionals, and government officials about the use and safety of glutamate. The Association also seeks to assure that relevant research and information on the safety and efficacy of MSG are made available to all interested parties.