

THE GLUTAMATE
ASSOCIATION
UNITED STATES

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Study Mischaracterizes Relationship Between MSG and Vision

WASHINGTON, D.C. (April 14, 2003) – A recently published Japanese study attempts to link monosodium glutamate (MSG) with visual deficiencies. Rats in this study were fed extremely high doses of MSG representing up to 20 percent of the total diet. The MSG levels used in this experiment are completely irrelevant to the human diet because MSG is typically added to foods at a level between 0.1 and 0.8 percent, a fraction of that used in this experiment. MSG when used at high levels will render foods inedible.

John Fernstrom, Ph.D., Professor of Psychiatry, Pharmacology & Neuroscience, at the University of Pittsburgh stated, “it is surprising that the animals in this study were able to withstand such excessive levels of MSG.” “Previous studies have been criticized for using excessive amounts of MSG and this study goes way beyond the levels used in those studies.”

The scientific and regulatory consensus is that MSG is safe. MSG is one of the most thoroughly studied of all food ingredients with hundreds of scientific studies supporting its safety. A number of well respected scientific bodies and regulatory agencies have reviewed the data on MSG and affirmed its safety for the general population including: the American Medical Association’s Council on Scientific Affairs, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the Federation of American Societies of Experimental Biology, the Joint Expert Committee on Food Additives (the scientific advisory body to the World Health Organization and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations) and the European Community’s Scientific Committee for Food.

Glutamate is an amino acid that is found naturally in a wide variety of food such as Parmesan cheese, tomatoes, mushrooms and is also found in breast milk. Glutamate enhances the flavor of foods and MSG is frequently added to foods as a source of glutamate. It is FDA’s view that there is no difference between the glutamate in MSG and that found naturally in foods.

MSG has been safely used as a flavor enhancer since the early 1900’s and has been on FDA’s list of generally recognized as safe (GRAS) substances since 1959 along with sugar, baking powder, vinegar and in any other common food ingredients.

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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.