

Comeback Kid—

How Tryptophan Regained Its Good Name

by Daniel Jacobs

Tryptophan has helped millions to find a deeper, more relaxing sleep, to relieve stress, and to relieve physical pain. In this article, you'll find the inside story on tryptophan: how it helped so many, how it fell, and how it returned...perhaps stronger than ever.

In the late eighties, tryptophan exploded into the nutritional industry. An amino acid occurring naturally in foods, tryptophan is necessary for the body's production of serotonin and melatonin, two brain chemicals vital for sleep and mood regulation. Doctors had found that, when taken as a supplement, tryptophan increases production of serotonin, thereby treating insomnia, depression, addiction, jet lag, and excessive appetite, among other maladies that occur when levels of serotonin are deficient. Many in the nutritional industry projected that tryptophan alone would command a multibillion-dollar industry. It was one of the hottest new supplements at the time.

DISASTER STRIKES

Just as doctors were beginning to understand the health benefits of tryptophan, disaster struck. In the summer and fall of 1989, thousands of Americans were sickened by an EMS (Eosinophilia-Myalgia Syndrome) outbreak. Though EMS is a potentially deadly blood disease usually linked to parasitic infections or severe allergies, the source of this outbreak seemed to be tryptophan.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administra-

tion (FDA) quickly banned tryptophan supplements, citing consumer safety—and in view of the thousands sickened by EMS, they were right to do so. In the following months, though, the truth about the EMS outbreak, and its relationship to tryptophan, became clear. This is the part of the story that was not told.

REAL FACTS

In August 1992, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released findings of a joint investigation with the Mayo Clinic, clearing unadulterated tryptophan of blame for the EMS outbreak. All cases of EMS had been caused by a contaminant found only in batches manufactured by a single Japanese firm: Showa Denko K.K.

The firm, in its haste to provide almost 60 percent of all tryptophan sold in the United States, sped up tryptophan's delicate fermentation process, and reduced the amount of charcoal used to filter the newly fermented supplement. Showa Denko's negligence was to blame, not tryptophan.

COINCIDENCE OR CONSPIRACY: FDA AND DRUG DEVELOPMENT

Although tryptophan itself was cleared of any role in the EMS outbreak, the

FDA refused to lift bans on the sale of the supplement. Millions of Americans who had safely, effectively, and economically relied on tryptophan to treat the insomnia, depression, anxiety, and other symptoms caused by low levels of serotonin were forced to find more expensive and more dangerous pharmaceutical solutions.

Why would the FDA prevent consumers from accessing a safer, more natural, and more effective solution to their serotonin depletion problems? The answer is disheartening. In June 1993, fully one year after the CDC had cleared uncontaminated tryptophan of responsibility in the EMS outbreak, the FDA Dietary Supplement Task Force published a report on the development of FDA policy vis-à-vis nutritional supplements. Unabashedly, the report states: "The Task Force considered various issues in its deliberations, including...what steps are necessary to ensure that the existence of dietary supplements on the market does not act as a disincentive for drug development."

ENTER PROZAC

Coincidentally, four days after tryptophan was banned as an over-the-counter supplement, *Newsweek* published a feature article praising Prozac® as the new



miracle drug for depression. The headline of the article, highlighted above a hovering Prozac capsule on the front page of the magazine, read: “Prozac: A Breakthrough Drug for Depression.”

Neither the media nor the public caught on to the connection between the rise of Prozac and the fall of tryptophan. But for those in the nutritional industry, the link seemed anything but coincidental. Prozac, a dangerous and expensive pharmaceutical drug, and tryptophan, a safe and economical natural supplement, both affect the neurotransmitter serotonin, albeit in very different ways.

Prozac, like most other antidepressant drugs prescribed by doctors—all of which have risky side effects—doesn’t produce serotonin. It helps the body to utilize whatever serotonin is available. Tryptophan, on the other hand, actually produces serotonin, thereby helping people who lack serotonin make enough of it to start feeling good again. Tryptophan practically guarantees high likelihood of beneficial results, whereas Prozac and other drugs are limited in their function.

BAN

Nine years after tryptophan had been cleared of any wrong doing, the FDA was forced by law to lift the ban on

tryptophan’s sale as an over-the-counter medication. In February of 2001, the FDA published an information paper on tryptophan. It stated that “Under the Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act (the Act), as amended by the Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act of 1994 (DSHEA), the manufacturer is responsible for ensuring that its products are safe.” Finally, the FDA had given responsible firms the opportunity to put our miracle supplement back on the market.

Despite tryptophan’s health benefits, nutritional companies were slow to re-embrace the supplement. The FDA and the pharmaceutical industry had severely injured tryptophan’s reputation. Public opinion—as we all know—is slow to change.

FTH NUTRACEUTICALS— RESTORING CONSUMER FAITH

Recently, though, FTH Nutraceuticals, a nutritional company with a reputation for producing some of the safest, highest-quality supplements on the market, began manufacturing tryptophan. “It’s time to restore consumer faith in a supplement that has the potential to do so much good,” Steven Bass, FTH president and founder, says.

QUALITY CONTROL WITH FTH NUTRACEUTICALS

Knowing the history of consumer confidence in tryptophan, nutritional companies like FTH must make a determined effort to demonstrate safety and quality control in their products. FTH has done that by embracing United States Pharmacopia (USP) standards requiring 99 percent purity in all supplements, and opening the door for FDA testing.

When FTH administered its own independent HPLC testing on tryptophan, the supplement was found to be 99.6 percent pure. When the FDA did a separate analysis, off the record, the supplement was found to be 99.8 percent pure. Such a high percentage of purity guarantees that FTH’s cus-

tomers are getting the safest and most effective tryptophan out there. Such stringent purity requirements are a breath of fresh air when compared to the 10-80 percent levels of purity usually found in the nutrition industry.

FTH also meets European Pharmaceutical (EP) and Japanese Pharmaceutical (JP) Grade requirements. “Our tryptophan has passed and exceeded every quality control measure out there,” says Bass. “Safety comes first for us. We wouldn’t give the public what we wouldn’t take ourselves or give to our families.”

THE COMEBACK KID

Health experts are convinced tryptophan can improve the quality of most of our lives. *Healthy Living* has been impressed with FTH’s commitment to restoring consumer confidence in natural solutions, and to returning tryptophan back to the consumer.

Tryptophan is bound to be the comeback kid of the nutritional industry. FTH Nutraceutical’s tryptophan will provide a safe, natural, and economical alternative to dangerous and expensive prescription drugs offered on the market today.

In the next few issues, we will detail the specific health benefits of tryptophan. We’re probably the only publication providing this cutting-edge and exciting information, so stay tuned.

These benefits include: increase in serotonin production, mood enhancement, anxiety relief, improvement in quality of sleep, pain tolerance, appetite control, relief from chemical addictions, and even relief from jet lag.

It’s an important supplement. It’s the comeback kid. ■



Resources

FTH supplements, including tryptophan, are available at health food stores nationwide. For more information or to find a store in your area, visit www.fthnutraceuticals.com or call (866) 554-7900.