

Aspartame: What You Don't Know Can Hurt You

If a product is approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and composed of natural ingredients, would you assume it is safe to consume?

If the same product is an artificial sweetener, would you assume it helps control your weight?

Millions of people use aspartame, the artificial sweetener known as NutraSweet™, with these assumptions in mind.

Aspartame can be found in thousands of products such as:

- instant breakfasts
- breath mints
- cereals
- sugar-free chewing gum
- cocoa mixes
- coffee beverages
- frozen desserts
- gelatin desserts
- juice beverages
- laxatives
- multivitamins
- milk drinks
- pharmaceuticals and supplements, including over-the-counter medicines
- shake mixes
- soft drinks
- tabletop sweeteners
- tea beverages
- instant teas and coffees
- topping mixes
- wine coolers
- yogurt

However, aspartame's tainted history of approval and potentially toxic ingredients cast serious doubt on the safety of this sugar substitute. Furthermore, aspartame may actually increase your appetite (Farber 52).

While the FDA approval may signal the green light for safe consumption, 85 percent of all complaints registered with the FDA are for adverse reactions to aspartame, including five reported deaths. A closer look at the unscientific studies, suspicious approval methods, and its harmful ingredients, reveal the hidden dangers of this artificial sweetener. In reality, aspartame poses a public health threat.

Ailments Resulting From Aspartame

The components of aspartame can lead to a wide variety of ailments. Some of these problems occur gradually while others are immediate, acute reactions.

A few of the many disorders associated with aspartame include the following:

- **Birth Defects**

A study funded by Monsanto to study possible birth defects caused by consuming aspartame was cut off after preliminary data showed damaging information about aspartame. Additionally, in the book, *While Waiting: A Prenatal Guidebook*, it is stated that aspartame is suspected of causing brain

damage in sensitive individuals. A fetus may be at risk for these effects. Some researchers have suggested that high doses of aspartame may be associated with problems ranging from dizziness and subtle brain changes to mental retardation.

- **Cancer (Brain Cancer)**

In 1981, an FDA statistician stated that the brain tumor data on aspartame was so "worrisome" that he could not recommend approval of NutraSweet.(14)

In a two-year study conducted by the manufacturer of aspartame, twelve of 320 rats fed a normal diet and aspartame developed brain tumors while none of the control rats developed tumors, and five of the twelve tumors were in rats given a low dose of aspartame.(15)

The approval of aspartame was a violation of the Delaney Amendment, which was supposed to prevent cancer-causing substances such as methanol (formaldehyde) and DKP from entering our food supply. A late FDA toxicologist testified before the U.S. Congress that aspartame was capable of producing brain tumors. This made it illegal for the FDA to set an allowable daily intake at any level. He stated in his testimony that Searle's studies were "to a large extent unreliable" and that "at least one of those studies has established beyond any reasonable doubt that aspartame is capable of inducing brain tumors in experimental animals ... " He concluded his testimony by asking, "What is the reason for the apparent refusal by the FDA to invoke for this food additive the so-called Delaney Amendment to the Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act? ... And if the FDA itself elects to violate the law, who is left to protect the health of the public?"(16)

In the mid-1970s it was discovered that the manufacturer of aspartame falsified studies in several ways. One of the techniques used was to cut tumors out of test animals and put them back in the study. Another technique used to falsify the studies was to list animals that had actually died as surviving the study. Thus, the data on brain tumors was likely worse than discussed above. In addition, a former employee of the manufacturer of aspartame told the FDA on July 13, 1977 that the particles of DKP were so large that the rats could discriminate between the DKP and their normal diet.(12)

- **Diabetes**

The American Diabetes Association (ADA) is actually recommending this chemical poison to persons with diabetes, but according to research conducted by a diabetes specialist, aspartame: 1) Leads to the precipitation of clinical diabetes. 2) Causes poorer diabetic control in diabetics on insulin or oral drugs. 3) Leads to the aggravation of diabetic complications such as retinopathy, cataracts, neuropathy and gastroparesis. 4) Causes convulsions.

In a statement concerning the use of products containing aspartame by persons with diabetes and hypoglycemia, the researchers says:

"Unfortunately, many patients in my practice, and others seen in consultation, developed serious metabolic, neurologic and other complications that could be specifically attributed to using aspartame products. This was evidenced by the loss of diabetic control, the intensification of hypoglycemia, the occurrence of presumed 'insulin reactions' (including convulsions) that proved to be aspartame reactions, and the precipitation, aggravation or simulation of diabetic complications (especially impaired vision and neuropathy) while using these products ... Dramatic improvement of such features after avoiding aspartame. and the prompt predictable recurrence of these problems when the

patient resumed aspartame products, knowingly or inadvertently."

Another researcher stated that excitotoxins such as those found in aspartame can precipitate diabetes in persons who are genetically susceptible to the disease.(5)

- **Emotional Disorders**

In a double blind study of the effects of aspartame on persons with mood disorders, findings showed a large increase in serious symptoms for persons taking aspartame. Since some of the symptoms were so serious, the Institutional Review Board had to stop the study. Three of the participants had said that they had been "poisoned" by aspartame. Researchers concluded that "individuals with mood disorders are particularly sensitive to this artificial sweetener; its use in this population should be discouraged."(18) One researcher stated about aspartame, "I know it causes seizures. I'm convinced also that it definitely causes behavioral changes. I'm very angry that this substance is on the market. I personally question the reliability and validity of any studies funded by the NutraSweet Company."(19)

Additionally, there are numerous reported cases of low brain serotonin levels, depression and other emotional disorders that have been linked to aspartame and often are relieved by stopping the intake of aspartame.

- **Epilepsy/Seizures**

With the large and growing number of seizures caused by aspartame, it is sad to see that the Epilepsy Foundation is promoting the "safety" of aspartame. At Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 80 people who had suffered seizures after ingesting aspartame were surveyed. Community Nutrition Institute concluded the following about the survey:

"These 80 cases meet the FDA's own definition of an imminent hazard to the public health, which requires the FDA to expeditiously remove a product from the market."

Both the Air Force's magazine, Flying Safety, and the Navy's magazine, Navy Physiology, published articles warning about the many dangers of aspartame including the cumulative delirious effects of methanol and the greater likelihood of birth defects. The articles note that the ingestion of aspartame can make pilots more susceptible to seizures and vertigo. Twenty articles sounding warnings about ingesting aspartame while flying have also appeared in the National Business Aircraft Association Digest (NBAA Digest 1993), Aviation Medical Bulletin (1988), The Aviation Consumer (1988), Canadian General Aviation News (1990), Pacific Flyer (1988), General Aviation News (1989), Aviation Safety Digest (1989), and Plane & Pilot (1990) and a paper warning about aspartame was presented at the 57th Annual Meeting of the Aerospace Medical Association (Gaffney 1986).

A hotline was even set up for pilots suffering from acute reactions to aspartame ingestion. Over 600 pilots have reported symptoms including some who have reported suffering grand mal seizures in the cockpit due to aspartame.(21)

Why don't we hear about these things?

The reason many people do not hear about serious reactions to aspartame is twofold: 1) Lack of awareness by the general population. Aspartame-caused diseases are not reported in the newspapers like plane crashes. This is because these incidents occur one at a time in thousands of different locations across the United States. 2) Most people do not associate their symptoms with the long-term use of aspartame. For the people who have killed a significant percentage of their brain

cells and thereby caused a chronic illness, there is no way that they would normally associate such an illness with aspartame consumption.

How aspartame was approved is a lesson in how chemical and pharmaceutical companies can manipulate government agencies such as the FDA, "bribe" organizations such as the American Dietetic Association, and flood the scientific community with flawed and fraudulent industry-sponsored studies funded by the makers of aspartame.

Erik Millstone, a researcher at the Science Policy Research Unit of Sussex University has compiled thousands of pages of evidence, some of which have been obtained using the freedom of information act 23, showing: 1. Laboratory tests were faked and dangers were concealed. 2. Tumors were removed from animals and animals that had died were "restored to life" in laboratory records. 3. False and misleading statements were made to the FDA. 4. The two US Attorneys given the task of bringing fraud charges against the aspartame manufacturer took positions with the manufacturer's law firm, letting the statute of limitations run out. 5. The Commissioner of the FDA overruled the objections of the FDA's own scientific board of inquiry. Shortly after that decision, he took a position with Burson-Marsteller, the firm in charge of public relations for G.D. Searle.

A Public Board of Inquiry (PBOI) was conducted in 1980. There were three scientists who reviewed the objections of Olney and Turner to the approval of aspartame. They voted unanimously against aspartame's approval. The FDA Commissioner, Dr Arthur Hull Hayes, Jr. then created a 5-person Scientific Commission to review the PBOI findings. After it became clear that the Commission would uphold the PBOI's decision by a vote of 3 to 2, another person was added to the Commission, creating a deadlocked vote. This allowed the FDA Commissioner to break the deadlock and approve aspartame for dry goods in 1981. Dr Jacqueline Verrett, the Senior Scientist in an FDA Bureau of Foods review team created in August 1977 to review the Bressler Report (a report that detailed G.D. Searle's abuses during the pre-approval testing) said: "It was pretty obvious that somewhere along the line, the bureau officials were working up to a whitewash." In 1987, Verrett testified before the US Senate stating that the experiments conducted by Searle were a "disaster." She stated that her team was instructed not to comment on or be concerned with the overall validity of the studies. She stated that questions about birth defects have not been answered. She continued her testimony by discussing the fact that DKP has been shown to increase uterine polyps and change blood cholesterol and that increasing the temperature of the product leads to an increase in production of DKP.(13)

Revolving Doors

The FDA and the manufacturers of aspartame have had a revolving door of employment for many years. In addition to the FDA Commissioner and two US Attorneys leaving to take positions with companies connected with G.D. Searle, four other FDA officials connected with the approval of aspartame took positions connected with the NutraSweet industry between 1979 and 1982 including the Deputy FDA Commissioner, the Special Assistant to the FDA Commissioner, the Associate Director of the Bureau of Foods and Toxicology and the Attorney involved with the Public Board of Inquiry.(24)

It is important to realize that this type of revolving-door activity has been going on for decades. The Townsend Letter for Doctors (11/92) reported on a study revealing that 37 of 49 top FDA officials who left the FDA took positions with companies they had regulated. They also reported that over 150 FDA officials owned stock in drug companies they were assigned to manage. Many organizations and universities receive large sums of money from companies connected to the NutraSweet Association, a group of companies promoting the use of aspartame. In January 1993, the American Dietetic

Association received a US\$75,000 grant from the NutraSweet Company. The American Dietetic Association has stated that the NutraSweet Company writes their "Facts" sheets.(25)

What is the FDA doing to protect the consumer from the dangers of aspartame?

Less than nothing.

In 1992, the FDA approved aspartame for use in malt beverages, breakfast cereals, and refrigerated puddings and fillings. In 1993 the FDA approved aspartame for use in hard and soft candies, non-alcoholic flavored beverages, tea beverages, fruit juices and concentrates, baked goods and baking mixes, and frostings, toppings and fillings for baked goods.

In 1991, the FDA banned the importation of stevia. The powder of this leaf has been used for hundreds of years as an alternative sweetener. It is used widely in Japan with no adverse effects. Scientists involved in reviewing stevia have declared it to be safe for human consumption--something that has been well known in many parts of the world where it is not banned. Some people believe that stevia was banned to keep the product from taking hold in the United States and cutting into sales of aspartame.(26)

What is the U.S. Congress doing to protect the consumer from the dangers of aspartame?

Nothing.

What is the U.S. Administration (President) doing to protect the consumer from the dangers of aspartame?

Nothing.

Aspartame consumption is not only a problem in the United States--it is being sold in over 70 countries throughout the world.