

SEROTONIN: The Natural Perspective

by Dr. Glenn R. Hoey, N.D.

In the many years that I have been practicing Naturopathic medicine I have seen some very disturbing trends. Conventional treatments tend to be like fashion trends.

It is interesting to note the great number of patients I have seen in my practice that do take or have taken antidepressant medication. Do we really have that many “depressed” people out there? Now I understand that life can be stressful, but it is interesting to observe how and why certain medications are prescribed. The latest fashion is to prescribe drugs such as Zoloft, Prozac, Paxil and others that are classified as Serotonin re-uptake inhibitors. These drugs help the Serotonin you *make* to stay around a little longer which makes you feel less “depressed” more calm, or “up” and allows you to sleep better.

Let’s take a minute to explain that Serotonin is and what you can do naturally to make it. Serotonin is a neurotransmitter, a chemical that sends messages to the nervous system. It’s a substance you make provided you have enough L-tryptophan. L-tryptophan is an essential amino acid that comes from protein. Remember that old adage about a glass of warm milk before bedtime? Between the L-tryptophan and the calcium you were assured a calm, relaxing sleep. So why do people need a drug when we supposedly make this stuff?

My observation is that we simply do not consume the raw materials that help us make Serotonin, namely protein. Protein is the source for L-tryptophan, and contrary to popular opinion, protein consumption is inadequate. I’ve taken numerous diet intake questionnaires from patients and the results are the same. Meat, fish, chicken, egg consumption is not enough to meet the body’s needs.

In 1988, the FDA banned the use of L-tryptophan supplements due to an outbreak of EMS, or Eosinophilia-myalgia syndrome, which caused much sickness and a few deaths. The illness was traced to a contaminated batch of L-tryptophan manufactured in Japan. The FDA has still not rescinded this ban.

My recommendations: Evaluate how often you eat protein throughout the day or week. If you’re not getting some *at every meal*, then do it! Also, have a protein snack before bedtime. This will help to raise serotonin levels. The supplement 5-HT, or 5-Hydroxy tryptophan, is a *precursor* to serotonin. This is a form of tryptophan that is one step closer to Serotonin and so far has not had any negative effects. 50-100 mg. before bedtime for better sleep, or 50 mg. 3 x daily for mood improvement. These are a more natural choice.

Dr. Hoey can be reached at his office at: (509) 66-1302