



- HOME
- CURRENT ISSUE
- ARCHIVE
- ACT!
- BEHIND THE LABEL
- DAILY LIFE
- DEBATE
- NEWSLETTER
- ABOUT US
- CONTACT US

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monthly newsletter

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## ASPARTAME

Aspartame is the most controversial food additive in history. The most recent evidence, linking it to leukaemia and lymphoma, has added substantial fuel to the ongoing protests of doctors, scientists and consumer groups who allege that this artificial sweetener should never have been released onto the market and that allowing it to remain in the food chain is killing us by degrees.

Date:05/08/2019

Author:Pat Thomas

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Once upon a time, aspartame was listed by the Pentagon as a biochemical warfare agent. Today it's an integral part of the modern diet. Sold commercially under names like NutraSweet and Canderel, aspartame can be found in more than 5,000 foods, including fizzy drinks, chewing gum, table-top sweeteners, diet and diabetic foods, breakfast cereals, jams, sweets, vitamins, prescription and over-the-counter drugs. This means that there is a good chance that you and your family are among the two thirds of the adult population and 40 per cent of children who regularly ingest this artificial sweetener.

Because it contains no calories, aspartame is considered a boon to health-conscious individuals everywhere; and most of us, if we think about it at all, think it is safe. But independent scientists say aspartame can produce a range of disturbing adverse effects in humans, including headaches, memory loss, mood swings, seizures, multiple sclerosis and Parkinson's-like symptoms, tumours and even death.

Concerns over aspartame's toxicity meant that for eight years, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) denied it approval, effectively keeping it off the world market. This caution was based on compelling evidence, brought to light by numerous eminent scientists, litigators and consumer groups, that aspartame contributed to serious central nervous system damage and had been shown to cause cancer in animals. Eventually, however, political muscle, won out over scientific rigour, and aspartame was approved for use in 1981 (see timeline for details).

The FDA's about-turn opened the floodgates for aspartame's swift approval by more than 70 regulatory authorities around the world. But, as the remarkable history of the sweetener shows, the clean bill of health given to it by government regulators - whose raison d'être should be to protect the public from harm - is simply not worth the paper it is printed on.

### ASPARTAME REACTIONS: A HIDDEN EPIDEMIC

Aspartame has been linked to a host of devastating central nervous system disorders

When aspartame was approved for use, Dr HJ Roberts, director of the Palm Beach Institute for Medical Research, had no reason to doubt the



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FDA's decision. 'But my attitude changed,' he says, 'after repeatedly encountering serious reactions in my patients that seemed justifiably linked to aspartame.' Twenty years on, Roberts has coined the phrase 'aspartame disease' to describe the wide range of adverse effects he has seen among aspartame-guzzling patients.

He estimates: 'Hundreds of thousands of consumers, more likely millions, currently suffer major reactions to products containing aspartame. Today, every physician probably encounters aspartame disease in everyday practice, especially among patients with illnesses that are undiagnosed or difficult to treat.'

As a guide for other doctors, Roberts, a recognised expert in difficult diagnoses, has published a lengthy series of case studies, *Aspartame Disease: an ignored epidemic* (Sunshine Sentinel Press), in which he meticulously details his treatment of 1,200 aspartame-sensitive individuals, or 'reactors', encountered in his own practice. Following accepted medical procedure for detecting sensitivities to foods, Roberts had his patients remove aspartame from their diets. With nearly two thirds of reactors, symptoms began to improve within days of removing aspartame, and improvements were maintained as long as aspartame was kept out of their diet.

Roberts' case studies parallel much of what was revealed in the FDA's report on adverse reactions to aspartame - that toxicity often reveals itself through central nervous system disorders and compromised immunity. His casework shows that aspartame toxicity can mimic the symptoms of and/or worsen several diseases that fall into these broad categories (see the box above).

#### **CONDITIONS MIMICKED BY ASPARTAME TOXICITY**

- multiple sclerosis
- Parkinson's disease
- Alzheimer's disease
- fibromyalgia
- arthritis
- multiple chemical sensitivity
- chronic fatigue syndrome
- attention deficit disorder
- panic disorder
- depression and other psychological disorders
- lupus
- diabetes and diabetic complications
- birth defects
- lymphoma
- Lyme disease
- hypothyroidism

Case studies, especially a large series like this, address some of the issues surrounding real-world use in a way that laboratory studies never can; and the conclusions that can be drawn from such observations aren't just startling, they are also potentially highly significant. In fact, Roberts believes that one of the major problems with aspartame research has been the continued over-emphasis on laboratory studies. This has meant that the input of concerned independent physicians and other interested persons, especially consumers, is 'reflexively discounted as "anecdotal"'.

Many of the diseases listed by Roberts fall into the category of medicine's 'mystery diseases' - conditions with no clear aetiology and few effective cures. And while no one is suggesting that aspartame is the single cause of such diseases, Roberts' research suggests that some people diagnosed with, for example, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's or chronic fatigue syndrome may end up on a regimen of potentially harmful drugs that could have been avoided if they simply

stopped ingesting aspartame-laced products.

*The full report is in the September 2005 issue of the Ecologist magazine.*

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