



The **Anaphylaxis** campaign
Helping people with severe allergies live their lives

U.S. reviewers dismiss MSG allergy concerns

New U.S. research dismisses the theory that monosodium glutamate (MSG) plays a significant role in the development of allergies such as asthma, urticaria and rhinitis.

The authors of the research present a critical summary of past studies that have investigated the role of MSG in eliciting allergy symptoms. They conclude that decades of research have failed to demonstrate a clear relationship between MSG ingestion and the development of allergic conditions.

The authors note that MSG is “generally regarded as safe” by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, but anecdotal reports and some clinical studies have raised public concerns since the late 1960s. Reports have focused on the “monosodium glutamate symptom complex” or “Chinese restaurant syndrome”.

Some reports suggest that a small amount of people may be at risk of developing complex symptoms when ingesting large quantities of MSG on an empty stomach without accompanying food.

An alleged correlation between MSG and asthma was considered after two women developed life-threatening asthma following the ingestion of meals containing MSG in Chinese restaurants. However several projects, including single-blind placebo-controlled studies, have failed to demonstrate an association between MSG and its role in asthma. Other studies reach a similar conclusion with regard to allergic conditions such as urticaria and rhinitis.

The latest review, from the Scripps Clinic in California, USA, concludes that it would be inappropriate to conclude that MSG consumed as part of a typical western diet would be likely to induce the symptoms of allergy.

Comment from the Campaign: “We are aware of one person who suffered severe exacerbation of asthma following a Chinese meal. He subsequently undertook a double blind challenge with MSG and had a reaction. It is clear there are rare cases where people genuinely react.”

Reference: Clinical & Experimental Allergy May 2009, Volume 39, Issue 5, Pages: 640-646. “Monosodium glutamate ‘allergy’: menace or myth?” Authors: A. N. Williams, K. M. Woessner.