Antidepressants and 5-HTP

Is it harmful to use 5-HTP while taking antidepressants or anti-anxiety medications?

Zoltan Rona, MD: 5-HTP (5-hydroxy-tryptophan) is an amino acid made in the body from dietary L-tryptophan. Supplemented 5-HTP can be derived from the seeds of a West African plant *Griffonia simplicifolia*. It is otherwise not available from the diet.

5-HTP is converted in the body to the neurotransmitter serotonin, which doctors want to increase in the brain when they prescribe antidepressants to treat depression. Doctors also prescribe it for a variety of other conditions, including insomnia, anxiety, migraine headaches, premenstrual syndrome, eating disorders, obesity, and chronic pain conditions such as fibromyalgia.

Since 5-HTP elevates serotonin levels, taking it in conjunction with prescription drugs designed to do the same thing could lead to potentially toxic levels of serotonin. This could cause neuromuscular hyperactivity, muscle spasms, and rigidity, as well as agitation, emotional overexcitement (mania), confusion, excessive sweating, fever, shortness of breath, and rapid heart rates.

If you are using one of the antidepressants known to elevate serotonin, use 5-HTP with caution and only with medical supervision.

As a transition between prescription antidepressants and the natural remedy 5-HTP, start by taking a low dose (50 mg three times daily) while continuing to take the prescription drug. After a few weeks, reduce or even eliminate the dose of the prescription antidepressant and gradually increase the dose of 5-HTP to control symptoms. Doses of 5-HTP must be individualized but the usual effective dose for most adults to control depression is somewhere between 300 and 900 mg daily. While not all people who are forced to use prescription antidepressants will eventually be able to use 5-HTP as an alternative, virtually all could reduce the doses of their drug prescription by supplementing regularly with 5-HTP.