

Prozac vs. Tryptophan: The Insane Connection

Prozac and similar "SSRI" antidepressants can reduce the loss of serotonin, but can't help the body produce more. And in order for it to work, there must be enough serotonin produced by a person to begin with. A 1992 study published in the *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry* showed that SSRIs abruptly stopped working when serotonin production fell too low, due to tryptophan deficiency, and then started working again upon supplementation with tryptophan. In other words, SSRI antidepressants can't even work without adequate tryptophan. Tryptophan is not produced by the body and can be tricky to absorb, so supplements are the obvious solution. In 1990, however, the FDA took tryptophan off the market after one tainted batch out of Japan resulted in an outbreak of a fatal, flu-like disease. The CDC and the Mayo Clinic soon identified a single source of the isolated, tainted batch, but even so, the FDA chose not to lift the ban. To the millions who could no longer relieve their own insomnia, depression, food cravings and migraines without a prescription drug (and without side-effects of SSRIs like loss of libido, dry mouth and tremors), this turn of events was perplexing. But the following passage from a report published a few years later by the FDA Dietary Supplement Task Force was illuminating: "The Task Force considered... what steps are necessary to ensure that the existence of dietary supplements on the market does not act as a disincentive for drug development." Only four days after the banning of what few health experts would argue is the safest and most effective natural mood lifter and sleep aid, Newsweek featured a story hailing Prozac as the next antidepressant.

During its ban, Tryptophan was ironically deemed safe enough for baby food, and to be sold by prescription (priced about five times higher than it was over the counter as a supplement). Most recently, you can once again buy tryptophan over the counter from hard-to-find sources like FTH Nutraceuticals.

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