MONOSODIUM GLUTAMATE (MSG)
WHAT IS MSG?

• Flavor enhancer commonly added to Chinese food, canned vegetables, soups and processed meats
• Umami: “5th taste” – MSG enhances flavor of bland recipes such as chicken broth
• The FDA requires added MSG to be listed on food labels
CONTROVERSY

FDA has received reports of symptoms such as:

- Headache
- Nausea
- Numbness
- Flushing
- Tingling
- Palpitations
- Drowsiness
• Glutamate: Applications in food and contribution to health (2010):
  • Glutamate, common amino acid found in nature and is naturally occurring in many foods
  • Generally Recognized as Safe (GRAS)
  • Does not increase food intake or induce obesity

RESEARCH (CONT.)

- Literature review of 40 years of research (2006):
  - Chinese restaurant syndrome: No significant difference in symptoms between 3g MSG and placebo
  - MSG as asthma trigger: No consistent evidence
  - MSG as migraine trigger: In the absence of clinical data, it is premature to make any conclusions

- Chinese food is exceptionally high in sodium and fat

• Safety evaluation of MSG (2000):
  • Dietary intake does not present health hazard
  • A subgroup of individuals may respond with symptoms when exposed to 3g MSG without food
    • A typical serving of food with added MSG contains less than 0.5g MSG
  • Concurred no link of MSG to serious, long-term medical problems in the general population

TAKE HOME MESSAGE

• Harmon’s fresh foods do not contain any MSG

• MSG not harmful at levels normally consumed

• The FDA had the FASEB examine the safety of MSG in the 1990s and concluded that it is safe

• Usually added to foods to short cut ingredients = mostly found in processed foods
REFERENCES

• Freeman M. Reconsidering the effects of monosodium glutamate: a literature review. J Am Acad Nurse Pract. 2006;14:482–486
