

MSG Intoxication and Chinese Restaurant Syndrome

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Chinese cuisine is famous worldwide for its uniqueness and varieties. Each Chinese dish concentrates on balancing between three aspects namely appearance (colour), aroma and taste. Some popular Chinese dishes are Fried rice, Noodles, Spring rolls, Szechwan chilli chicken, Garlic soya chicken, Honey chilli potato, Hot and sour soup, Mushroom manchurian etc.



Shramana Roy Barman

Image 1: Chinese Food

Chinese food and soups contain mainly monosodium glutamate (MSG) as an addictive ingredient (flavor enhancer). Other frequently used food additives are sodium metabisulphite (food preservative), soya sauce which is the fermentation product of soy and wheat (used for developing color and enhancing flavor). Other coloring agents are carmosine, sunset yellow, tartrazine etc.

All these food additives especially MSG causes allergic reactions in sensitive individuals. A group of symptoms familiar as **‘Chinese Restaurant Syndrome’** include headache, throbbing of the head, dizziness, lightheadedness, nausea, a feeling of facial pressure, tightness of the jaw, burning or tingling sensations over parts of the body, chest pain, and back pain etc. Excessive amount of MSG can cause arterial dilatation (widening of arteries) too. Psychiatric reactions (neurotoxic effect) to MSG have also been reported. A case study on 38-year-old lady revealed her suffering from a long-term psychological disorder secondary to MSG ingestion.

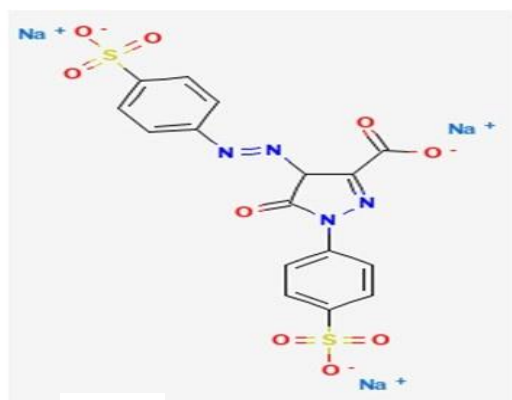


Fig.1 Tartrazine

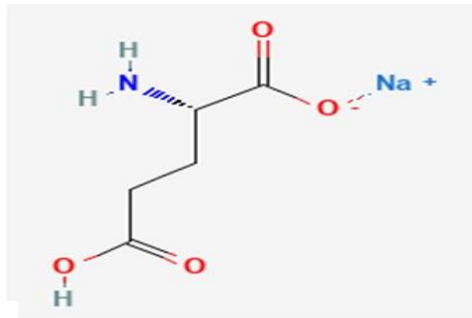


Fig2 Mono sodium glutamate (MSG)

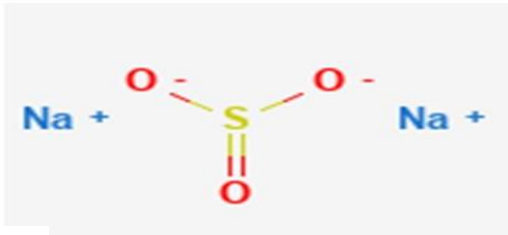


Fig 3 Sodium metabisulphite

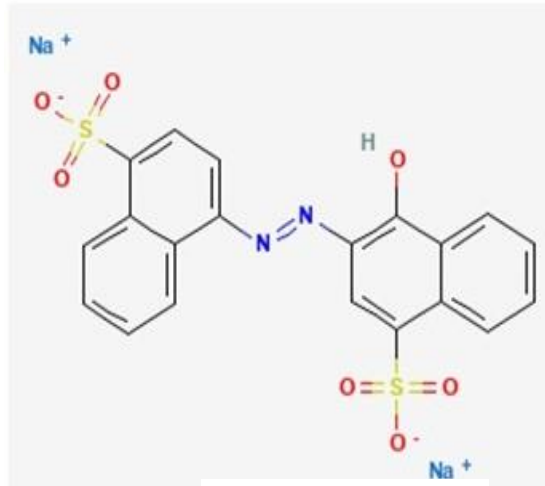


Fig.4 Carmosine

Both human and human model studies have revealed toxic effects of MSG even on the reproductive system. A similar study on a human model revealed that MSG consumption and haemoglobin levels are positively related to each other. There are also evidences of intolerance of glutamate in children. Oxidative stress, DNA damage, protein modification and lysis of stromal cells are also not very uncommon.

Spreading of public awareness must be done to protect the human life from these deleterious effects of Chinese food on human health. One must keep in mind that, food is one of basic needs for the sustenance of human life and it must not be used to destruct the same.