



The Facts on Monosodium Glutamate (MSG)

MSG was discovered in Japan in the early 1900's and is used extensively in eastern cuisine e.g. Chinese, Japanese and Thai cooking.

Glutamic acid is a naturally occurring amino acid, one of the building blocks of protein and is found in nearly all foods especially dairy products, meat, fish and many vegetables. The body also produces large quantities of glutamic acid and it is involved in many bodily functions. On cooking, fermentation or ripening glutamic acid is converted to glutamate and this gives food its special flavour, now considered to be a fifth taste called "Umami" roughly translated from Japanese to mean "deliciousness". An example of this is where we add parmesan cheese to pasta to improve its flavour. Glutamate, when added to sodium, becomes MSG.

In the European Union, monosodium glutamate is classified as a food additive (E621) and regulations are in place to determine how and when it can be added to foods. Typically, monosodium glutamate is added to savoury prepared and processed foods such as frozen foods, spice mixes, canned and dry soups, salad dressings and meat or fish-based products. In some countries, it is used as a table-top seasoning.

A small number of people report a sensitivity to MSG and this can be referred to Chinese Restaurant Syndrome or CRS. Symptoms of this include burning sensations at the back of the neck, chest tightness, nausea, sweating and migraine. However, a double-blind controlled challenge of individuals claiming to suffer from the syndrome failed to confirm MSG as the causative agent. Other studies have found that allergic type reactions after Asian meals are more often due to other ingredients such as shrimp, peanuts, spices and herbs.

If you think you are sensitive to MSG or any other food ingredient it is best to check with your doctor or a qualified dietitian.



MSG contains about one third of the sodium of table salt and is used in smaller amounts because of its potency. It is therefore useful for reducing the total sodium content of a meal.

MSG may also be found on labels as:

- Monopotassium glutamate
- Glutavene
- Glutacyl
- Glutamic acid
- Autolyzed yeast extract
- Calcium caseinate
- Sodium caseinate
- E621

Monosodium glutamate is one of the most extensively studied food ingredients in our food supply. Hundreds of studies and numerous scientific evaluations have concluded that monosodium glutamate provides a safe and useful taste enhancer for foods. It is listed as a permitted additive by the Food Safety Authority of Ireland and as such is regulated and monitored by them.

For advice about nutrition speak to a dietitian. Contact the Irish Nutrition and Dietetic Institute (indi) at 01-2804839 or email info@indi.ie. Our website is www.indi.ie

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