

Boomer Breakthrough – Keeping in the Game

If there is not thing boomers need to manage, its chronic stress. That's because of its deleterious effects, which include accelerated aging and altered brain function. This month boomer breakthroughs will focus on 5-hydroxytryptophan or 5-htp, one of the most versatile and powerful anti-aging remedies. For starters, 5-htp is a more powerful antioxidant than either vitamin C or melatonin. This it deserves a place in ones daily vitamin regimen based on this fact alone. However, the better-known attribute of 5-htp is its stabilizing effects on the brain and nerves.

Mood, Anxiety and Depression

Chronic stress can lead to mood swings, anxiety, depression, poor memory, and reduced cognitive functions. Last month we recommended the adaptogen herbs Ashwagandha and Rhodiola as therapy for smoothing out periods of intense stress such as looming deadlines. For longer term stress supplementation with 5-htp is a better choice. That's because extended periods of stress reduce brain levels of serotonin. Supplemental 5-htp is produced from the African plant Griffonia Simplicifolia and has over 30 years of safety and effectiveness in clinical use.

How do you know if you have low levels of serotonin? Persistent anxiety is one key and insomnia is another. 5-htp, an intermediary metabolite of serotonin, has proven to be clinically effective in reducing these disorders. Weight gain and eating disorders also appear to be associated with low serotonin levels.

Serotonin the Antiaging Neurotransmitter

Serotonin, one of three major neurotransmitters, has a calming effect and helps keep emotions in check. It has been extremely helpful in lessening panic attacks, various phobias, suppressing appetite, and reducing aggression, anxiety, and pain sensation. And, it may be more effective in relieving mild depression than antidepressants. In a 1991 Swiss study, the effectiveness of 5-htp in alleviating depression was compared to a conventional antidepressant, fluvoxamine (Luvox). Patients were divided into two groups and given either 100mg 5-htp or 150mg of fluvoxamine three times a day for six weeks. At the end of the test period, the 36 5-htp patients showed a greater percentage of improvement than the 33 fluvoxamine patients.

Other studies have compared 5-htp with antidepressants such as clomipramine and imipramine. 5-htp was at least as effective if not more so than the conventional drugs. Moreover, 5-htp has no reported side effects, although some patients have experienced mild nausea when they first take 5-htp. If this happens, merely back off and reduce the daily dose to 50mg and gradually increase it over a four-day period.

5-htp has an advantage over its precursor amino acid L-Tryptophan (LT). it is more readily absorbed than LT and is immune to meals without reducing its effectiveness. 5-htp, unlike LT, is not shunted into niacin, melatonin, picolinic acid and other amino acids. Seventy percent of

oral 5-htp ends up in the bloodstream, crosses into the brain and is directly converted into serotonin.

It's best not to combine 5-htp with antidepressant medications, although there have been no reports of adverse events. Suggested doses is 100mg 3 times a day or 200 to 200 mg taken at bedtime for insomnia.

Pain, Per-menopause and PMS

5-htp has additional benefits for boomers. It reduces hot flashes and is an effective anti-pain remedy. The concern over use of hormone replacement therapy (HRT) has led to interest in safe and effective methods of reducing hot flashes. Some anti-depressants (Prozac, etc.) have been effective in alleviating hot flashes in women with breast cancer or at risk of the disease. Increasing serotonin is the proposed mechanism by which this occurs. Serotonin in turn resets the brain's heat regulating system. 5-htp is effective at raising serotonin levels, is free of side effects, and is an effective substitute for anti-depressants.

Additionally, 5-htp has been clinically useful in reducing premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD) symptoms such as sadness, hopelessness, self-deprecation, tension, anxiety, emotional instability, tearfulness, anger and irritability.

Migraine and fibromyalgia share a common root in serotonin and adrenal hormone (Cortisol) receptor function. Serotonin plays a role in maintaining pain thresholds, vascular constriction/dilation and maintenance of restorative sleep. It is also thought to disrupt pain signals and induce the activity of endorphins, the brain's natural painkiller.

Italian researchers report in two clinical trials involving patients with fibromyalgia, that 5-htp (100mg 3X/day) significantly reduced fibromyalgia symptoms. These include a number of tender points, subjective pain severity, morning stiffness, sleep patterns, and anxiety