DANGEROUS AND SWEET

By D. Raymond Schmidt

NUTRASWEET or EQUAL are the names used for the chemical sweetener ASPERTAME. It was discovered in the 1960s by accident by a chemist who was working on an ulcer medicine at G.D. Searle. The compound ran over the beaker, getting on his finger. He absentmindedly licked the finger and found it sweet to the taste. ASPERTAME's history has indeed been stormy and many questions have NOT to date been addressed as to its safety regarding its short and long term use by humans.

ASPERTAME is a synthetic compound of two amino acids, ASPERTATE and PHENYLALNINE bonded by METHANOL (WOOD ALCOHOL) CH30H. These two amino acids are isolated from the usual 20 which combine to form proteins. The body has no trouble metabolizing large proteins (fish, chicken, etc.) because it is done slowly. Aspertame is a tiny molecule which the body cannot metabilize slowly, therefore it goes into the blood stream quickly. When this molecule enters the blood stream, the chemicals in Aspertame break down and become METHYL ALCOHOL, ASPARTIC ACID and PHENYLALANINE, plus at least 10 others which have been identified.

ASPERTAME breaks down rapidly in the body to METHOL ALCOHOL (WOOD ALCOHOL) and converts to FORMALDEHYDE (CH20)...Formaldehyde can attach to proteins and make protein behave differently...it can make them appear to the body as foreign protein and can set a whole implication with AUTO IMMUNE DISEASE.

When ASPERTAME breaks down rapidly in the body, two known TOXIC substances are formed, FORMALDEHYDE and FORMIC ACID. In November 1977 the EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) set the minimum acute toxic

concentration for METHANOL (WOOD ALCOHOL) consumption by humans to be approximately 4 MG (Milligrams) per liter...to daily consumption 8 MG. There are approximately 55 MG in the average diet soda sweetened with Nutrasweet.

METHYL ALCOHOL is POISONOUS to humans when it stands alone. When METHYL ALCOHOL appears in some natural foods (juices, fruit, vegetables), it is there in combination with ethyl alcohol. The ethyl alcohol is nature's way of neutralizing methyl alcohol as we metabolize the foods.

Signs of METHANOL poisoning are headaches, numbness of extremities, vertigo (dizziness), depression, blurred vision, nausea, confusion, abdominal pain, etc. Methanol poisoning has identical symptoms similar to MS (Multiple Sclerosis). Methanol's side effects are hangover, seizures, convulsions (Grand Mal type), cramps, weight gain. Methol Alcohol is TOXIC to the Brain-Heart-Lungs-Liver-Thymus. It is a specific human toxin known to be associated with Central Nervous Disorders.

Methanol is more toxic to humans than other living things. If ASPERTAME is heated over 85 degrees F, the chemical change (described above) occurs, creating free-standing Methyl Alcohol before it is ingested. This over 85 degree temperature can occur in a warehouse, delivery truck, the home, garage, etc.

Individuals who have the inability to metabolize phenylalanine suffer from PHENYLKETONURIA or PKU. They will become retarded if the intake of phenylalanine is not restricted. Infants are treated for PKU at birth in recent years.

There are as many as twenty million Americans who are carriers of the PKU gene, but are not phenletonurics. This means that one parent can have a single PKU gene and the other can have two PKU genes, which are paired. The child won't be PKU, but the carrier of the single gene will be intolerant to Aspertame. The test for PKU carriers is only performed on request. You may be a carrier and not be aware of it. If both parents have a single gene, the baby will be PKU.

Aspertame is 180 to 200 times sweeter than sugar. Aspertame is not for weight loss, rather it has been noted that it causes weight gain.

It is said that a liter of diet soda with Nutrasweet contains the same amount of methyl alcohol as 4/5ths of Wild Turkey Whiskey.

The FDA gave Aspertame approval for public use in 1974 but then rescinded that approval before it could be put into production, due to reports of unsure safety and unsuitable research practices on the part of Searle.

In 1980, an inhouse FDA panel of scientists recommended the agency withhold approval (again) until further studies could be performed. They were not satisfied that the substance was safe and did not cause cancerous brain tumors.

Prior to 1980, the FDA continued to refuse approval for the next seven years, while continuing investigation and inquiry went on. The tests by Searle were done before 1975 and 90 of the 113 done were submitted by Searle to FDA from the early to mid-70s. All of these were called into question by the Special Task Force investigation.

One of the FDA scientists at the time, Dr. Adrian Gross, says that Searle had tumors removed from laboratory animals before presenting the data to the FDA. He also says that the autopsies which normally are performed upon the death of an animal, were put off for months or a year. The animal tissues were so decomposed by this time they could not be identified.

The allegation is that Searle provided only data it wanted the FDA to review.

The FDA did not do testing or research on its own. They are only a review board.

In 1976 the FDA did instigate a Grand Jury investigation through the Justice Department, because of the false and incomplete data Searle had submitted to the Agency. The two Senior Justice Department prosecutors decided against prosecuting the manufacturer and later joined the law firm which represented Searle in the matter.

The acting FDA Commissioner Arthur Hull Hayes, newly appointed by the Reagan Administration, overruled the recommendation of the FDA scientists to withhold approval and licensed Aspertame in April of 1981. This approval was strictly for use in dry formula only, never considered for future use in carbonated beverages.

In 1983 it was approved for use in carbonated beverages by the Commissioner. Hayes resigned his post two months later and went to wrok for a firm that represented Searle's Nutrasweet advertising account.

In the summer of 1984, the National Soft Drink Association prepared a 31 page protest against the use of ASPERTAME in carbonated beverages before the approval was granted by the FDA. It cited in great detail the controversy surrounding the use of ASPERTAME and the question of Searle's laboratory research practice. They were more than concerned.

The Association was mysteriously convinced that all of their concerns were unfounded and the protest was never presented. It has been alleged that the National Soft Drink Association (NSDA) was offered a better price for purchasing ASPERTAME, and that since one independent company had already begun using Nutrasweet in their soft drinks, the others wouldn't want to be left out of the PROFITS.

Sources say the FDA assumed that most people would not consume over one diet soda per day.

Now it is in many foods and drinks. There is no way of knowing how much an individual is consuming of the TOXIC substance METHYL ALCOHOL.

There have been thousands of complaints about ASPERTAME. Many reputable scientists have believed it should not be on the market. In 1985 Senator Metzanbaum (Dem.-Ohio) introduced an amendment for quantity on labels and how much was safe. It was voted down.

Senator Metzanbaum also introduced a bill on August 1, 1985, Bill #S1557, appropriately entitled--The ASPERTAME Safety Act of 1985. It clearly states all the facts in detail and calls for BANNING OF THE PRODUCT.

No action has been taken on the Bill S1557 since its introduction; however, more scientific studies done with funds provided by the National Institute of Health have provided enough evidence to warrant Senator Metzanbaum's request for hearings of ASPERTAME Safety to be granted.

Nothing has come from all this, except we know that studies have not been done on the long term effects of METHANOL on humans. And very little is known about the short term effects except that small quantities will kill a human.

No studies or very few have been done on how METHANOL affects humans as a MUTAGEN-TERTAGEN-CARCINOGEN. All these studies should have been done before permitting its use. WHY were these studies not done? It should be banned until these studies are done. Pregnant women and children should avoid any and all ASPERTAME.

People are being used as guinea pigs to test ASPERTAME. The USA uses probably more per capita than any country. I suggest that some of the erratic mood and behavior we see in our society is directly related to diet.

Any product containing ASPERTAME must have special labeling. Searle's advertisements say the FDA Commissioner said when approving Aspertame that "Few compounds have withstood such detailed testing and repeated close scrutiny and the process through which Aspertame has gone should provide the public with additional confidence of its safety."!!!

The following quotation from the literature of Nutrasweet Co. shows how deplorable the Aspertame approval is from the very agencies who should be protecting our health and foods. "The safety of Nutrasweet has been reaffirmed by the Council on Scientific Affairs of the American Medical Association, the Americna Dietetic Association, the Canadian Health Protection Branch (HPB) and the World Health Organization (WHO). Further, in 1985 the Center for Disease Control (CDC) also indicated that there was no connection between Nutrasweet (ASPERTAME) and health problems."

Who then will protect our health if not ourselves???

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UPDATE August 1992: Further information can be had from
"NUTRI VOICE", PO Box 946, Oak Park, IL 60303