



Susannab Lawson

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Supplement focus

5-HTP

What if you could feel happier, sleep better and look slimmer? This supplement may just be able to help



What is it?

5-Hydroxytryptophan – or 5-HTP for short – is a chemical made in your body from protein. It's converted into the feel-good neurotransmitter serotonin, which in turn is transformed into the sleep hormone melatonin. It's also available as a supplement (see below).

How do I use it?

5-HTP isn't found in food, but it's made in your body from the amino acid tryptophan, which is rich in foods including fish, turkey, chicken, cheese, beans, tofu, oats and eggs. The conversion process requires B vitamins, vitamin C and zinc, so these nutrients are vital for ensuring you can make adequate serotonin. Exposure to sunlight and exercise can also boost levels. Taking a supplement of 5-HTP, which is derived from the seeds of an African plant called *Griffonia simplicifolia*, for a few months can help to correct a deficiency.

How much do I need?

There is no official recommended daily allowance for 5-HTP*, but supplementing 50mg up to three times

HOW CAN IT HELP ME?

Ease depression – many antidepressant drugs focus on increasing levels of serotonin, but some research has shown 5-HTP can do it better and without the unpleasant side effects. For example, a double-blind trial at Basel University of Psychiatry gave depressed patients either 300mg of 5-HTP or the antidepressant fluvoxamine. After six weeks, those on 5-HTP showed a greater improvement in their depression, as well as anxiety, insomnia and physical symptoms.

Enhance sleep – at night, serotonin is converted into melatonin, which makes you sleepy. A French study reported that 100mg of 5-HTP before bed enhanced sleep patterns and reduced insomnia.

Aid weight loss – several studies have linked 5-HTP to weight loss, particularly in those who are already obese. In one trial, those supplementing 5-HTP before meals went on to eat fewer calories, even though they were not trying to diet. A follow-up study then found that those who took 5-HTP reported 'significant weight loss' after six weeks, leading the authors to conclude that '5-HTP may be safely used to treat obesity'.

Relieve migraines – a study published in the journal *European Neurology* found that 71 per cent of migraine sufferers supplementing with 5-HTP experienced 'significant improvement' in their symptoms.

a day can help to correct an imbalance. The only potential side effect is that it can cause nausea – if this occurs, reduce the dose and build it up more slowly. II



DO YOU LACK THE 'HAPPY' CHEMICAL?

Serotonin is key for happiness, and low levels can lead to

depression. Women are more likely to be deficient than men, with research from the McGill University in Montreal finding men make, on average, more than twice the levels of women. This may be due to the relationship between serotonin and the female hormone oestrogen, with fluctuations in the latter before a period, during pregnancy and after menopause – possibly explaining why women are more susceptible to low mood at these times. Other deficiency signs of 5-HTP, which makes serotonin, include anxiety, obsessive tendencies, a greater sensitivity to pain, cravings for carbohydrates and sugary foods, problems sleeping and symptoms that are worse in winter.