

calm anxiety and more with. suntheanine

A COMPOUND FROM GREEN TEA CAN RELIEVE STRESS, EASE PMS AND EVEN HELP YOU GET A GOOD NIGHT'S SLEEP (IN 30 MINUTES OR LESS).

BY LAUREL VUKOVIC, M.S.W.

IF YOU'RE FEELING TENSE, giving up caffeine is generally regarded as a good idea. But a compound called L-theanine—extracted from caffeine-rich green tea—appears to be a potent antidote to stress and anxiety, helping to calm both body and mind. In addition, a highly concentrated form of L-theanine, called Suntheanine, has been shown to ease PMS symptoms and can help you get a good night's sleep.

With approximately 30 mg of caffeine per cup, researchers have long wondered why green tea (*Camellia sinensis*) creates calmness instead of the jitters. Their curiosity led to the discovery of the relaxing properties of L-theanine, a compound found in tea leaves that was previously thought to simply give green tea its unique flavor. Because L-theanine accounts for less than 2% of the weight of dried tea leaves, you would have to drink six to eight cups of high-quality green tea to obtain a significant mood-altering dose; many brands of green tea sold in the United States don't contain any of the compound. To solve this dilemma, Japanese researchers have developed a unique patented enzymatic process to concentrate L-theanine, creating a product called Suntheanine.

HOW IT WORKS

L-theanine is a derivative of glutamic acid, a neurotransmitter found in the brain. It's readily absorbed by the brain, where it influences brain chemicals that determine mood, including gamma aminobutyric acid (GABA), dopamine and serotonin. Unlike many drugs prescribed to calm anxiety, L-theanine

doesn't cause drowsiness or interfere with mental sharpness. In fact, it improves concentration and focus.

To quantify the effects of Suntheanine, researchers measured brain wave activity. They found that Suntheanine stimulates the production of alpha waves, an indicator of relaxed alertness—the same state that occurs with meditation, for example. The mood-enhancing effects of Suntheanine work quickly; in studies, the production of alpha waves has been observed within 30 to 40 minutes of taking the supplement. Research also shows that the intensity of alpha waves increases with higher dosages of Suntheanine.

SCIENTIFIC SUPPORT

Most of the research on L-theanine has been done in Japan, where it has been used for 40 years for stress and anxiety reduction. In a Japanese study published in 1998, researchers evaluated the effectiveness of L-theanine in the form of Suntheanine in eight students suffering from anxiety. During the first and fourth weeks of the study, the students were given

plain water. During the second and fifth weeks, they were given 50 mg of Suntheanine in water, and during the third and sixth weeks, they were given 200 mg of Suntheanine in water. Throughout the study, the researchers measured the students' alpha brain waves; all had larger alpha waves (and reported feeling less stressed) while taking 200 mg of Suntheanine. Alpha wave activity increased slightly when the students took 50 mg of Suntheanine, and there was no change in brain waves when the students drank only plain water.

In an unpublished 2001 Japanese study, Suntheanine was shown to significantly reduce the emotional, mental and physical symptoms of PMS in women taking 200 mg of the supplement daily. Another study the same year showed that Suntheanine improved sleep quality and resulted in more refreshing sleep, including fewer nighttime awakenings and nightmares.

GUIDELINES FOR USE

Based on the results of clinical studies, the most effective dosage of Suntheanine for promoting relaxation is 50 to 200 mg. For

best results, take it at the first sign of stress or anxiety—you should notice results in approximately 30 minutes. The effects generally last up to eight hours, and the dosage can be repeated two to three times per day, or as needed. For sleep enhancement, take 200 mg one hour before bed. L-theanine can be taken with food or on an empty stomach.

You can find L-theanine capsules in many natural food stores. The proprietary brand Suntheanine is found in a number of L-theanine supplements. It's considered extremely safe, and has no reported side effects. In fact, in Japan, L-theanine is added to soft drinks, candy and chewing gum to enhance mood and create relaxation.

Unlike sedative drugs, or even sedative herbs such as kava and valerian (*Valeriana officinalis*), L-theanine and the concentrated form, Suntheanine, do not cause drowsiness or impair mental or physical functioning. If you are pregnant or taking prescription drugs, check with your health care practitioner before using L-theanine. ■

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