

A Momentary Lapse of Reason: Living with L-Tryptophan Induced EMS and the Hidden Dangers of Genetic Modification of Our Foods

Henryk Behr

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In describing his harrowing medical misadventure, author Henryk Behr begins with a simple but heartbreaking statement: "This is a record of a[my] tragedy."

What follows is an account that is likely to chill any reader, particularly those who've never had to deal with serious physical issues. Behr notes that he had a few health problems a decade earlier, but that he was feeling very fit and happy in his marriage, enjoying life with his toddler, and adjusting well to his family's new home in a charming Scottish village.

He could not know that, soon, everything would change. On a visit to his chiropractor, Behr asked the practitioner to attempt an adjustment that he had experienced elsewhere, with good results. Unfortunately, the technique left Behr with a stiff neck and subsequent sleeping difficulties. To combat insomnia, he turned to an amino acid called L-Tryptophan, which he'd read about in a book co-authored by a renowned nutritionist. Taking the supplement without extensive research was a "momentary lapse of reason" on his part, he admits, but he purchased the pills from a reputable company and took them as directed. He never suspected that taking just two capsules would change his life forever.

After taking the supplement, Behr contracted Eosinophilia Myalgia Syndrome (EMS), a very rare, untreatable autoimmune condition that the author believes will shorten his life considerably. L-Tryptophan's shady history and its roots in genetic engineering combine tragically with its purveyor's refusal to adhere to an earlier ban on the supplement. Delving deep into the supplement's past, Behr is horrified to learn that it would even be allowed on store shelves.

His anger about the lack of product regulation is understandable, and he channels his frustration and indignation into his writing with ferocity, making his book more of a compelling manifesto than a memoir about a challenging health event. Behr writes: "To me, to us, this is a shocking tale, a tale of deceit, of corruption, of corporate greed and lies, which has destroyed our lives and possibly brought about my early demise for the benefit of corporate (biotech) profits."

In addition to providing ample evidence of L-Tryptophan's effects, Behr proves adept at describing the downward spiral of his illness and his struggles to understand what is happening to his body. Ensuing difficulties with his marriage and with other familial relationships provide a wrenching, important account of what can happen when chronic health problems become a central force in one's life. Behr's heartbreak is evident, and his cautionary tale about a seemingly innocent decision should be required reading for anyone looking to experiment with food additives and other supplements. He offers a forthright and powerful chronicle of his descent into personal tragedy.

ELIZABETH MILLARD (December 5, 2011)

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