



G&G Information Sheet

23 November 2021

Updated April 2022

Updated June 2024

5-HTP from Griffonia Seed

This is a basic summary of currently available data on the subject of 5-HTP and Griffonia seed extracts, data can and probably will change, so this will need updating as necessary.

Historically, Griffonia was barely known before the early 90s. In 1989 through to around 2005 there was a global ban on L-Tryptophan, following a contaminated batch from Japan causing deaths in the USA. People started to look for alternatives and Griffonia was found.

Griffonia seed contains between 10% and 20% of naturally occurring 5-HTP (5-hydroxytryptophan), 5-HTP is produced by an enzymatic reaction on L-Tryptophan and L-Tryptophan is obtained through various food sources.

So, L-Tryptophan is converted into 5-HTP and that is instrumental in the production of serotonin. Serotonin is an important neurotransmitter and affects mood, among other things.

L-Tryptophan was “unbanned” in the UK around the mid- to late-2000s as long as it was EP (European Pharmacopoeia) grade and the maximum allowed dose was, and still is, 220mg.

5-HTP has been known about for a long time, there are clinical studies from 1982; “Serotonin precursors in the treatment of depression” from *Advances in Biochemical Psychopharmacology*. Consequently, it is a registered pharmaceutical in many EU countries and is used as an antidepressant, sleep aid and appetite suppressant. It is used as a food supplement in the USA, Canada and the UK.

We started selling 5-HTP from Griffonia extract in 2010, the extract was always around 98% 5-HTP. Interestingly, the earliest clinical studies I could find on 5-HTP from Griffonia extracts was from 2010, so it wasn't officially studied until after the ban on L-Tryptophan was lifted, even though it had been in use.



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In November 2018 I was told (unofficially) by one of our suppliers that the 98/99% materials would likely become medicinal as they are highly purified extracts and cannot be classed as foods. There was also the possibility of being Novel. Following that a 30% material was sourced which is water extracted, so more natural levels of 5-HTP. Water extraction is always preferable as there is no alcohol residue and it can only extract a certain amount, alcohol extracts far more but also sometimes other unwanted substances as well. There is also a 20% Griffonia extract available, which would make it even more natural.

Around October 2020 EFSA added 5-HTP to the Novel Food Catalogue, however Griffonia seeds are not Novel and are allowed in food supplements. Further, RASFF (Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed) alerts were made in the last few years from Sweden, Czech, Poland and Estonia, which blocked supplements with 5-HTP at the borders.

We asked the HFMA for advice and their FAQ sheet accompanies this document and we asked one of our suppliers about regulatory status and that document also accompanies this. There seem to be different viewpoints in different countries.

The bottom line here is, we will phase out the >98% material and use the 30% (or 20%) for now. As we have a variety of customers in the UK and all across the EU, we cannot advise them of the legality or correctness of which extract they can or should use. We can point them in the right direction but ultimately, they are liable for their decisions. We can give them all the data we have and they make an informed choice or seek expert advice in their region. There is also the Mutual Recognition principle which allows products sold in one EU country to be sold in all others, so customers can try that if deemed necessary.

*** April 2022 Update ***

Latest news from the EU...

EC amended Novel Food Catalogue on 5-HTP

The European Commission (EC) has recently amended the entries "Griffonia simplicifolia" and "5-hydroxytryptophan" (5-HTP) in the Novel Food Catalogue. EHPM liaised with the EC's DG SANTE to understand the reasons behind these changes.

The entries "Griffonia simplicifolia" and "5-hydroxytryptophan" (5-HTP) in the Novel Food Catalogue have been recently amended. The entries (accessible [here](#)) now read as follows:

- Griffonia simplicifolia: "The request concerns the seeds of Griffonia simplicifolia (Vahl ex DC.) Baill. (syn. Bandeiraea simplicifolia (Vahl ex DC.) Benth.), which are considered not novel in food supplements. The use of selective extract of 5-HTP from Griffonia simplicifolia seeds is considered as novel food."



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- 5-hydroxytryptophan: "5-hydroxytryptophan (5-HTP) regardless of whether is chemically synthesised or selectively extracted from Griffonia simplicifolia seeds is considered novel in food."

EHPM contacted the responsible Unit within DG SANTE to understand the reasons behind these changes. In their response, DG SANTE informed EHPM that:

- Member States (MSs) raised some concerns on the clarity of the information related to the entry "Griffonia simplicifolia". Specifically, the previous wording indicated that "extracts from Griffonia simplicifolia could be considered as novel". Therefore, MSs agreed on the need to amend that entry. For consistency reasons, the entry related to synthetic 5-HTP was also amended.
- Moreover, some MSs (e.g., Spain and Ireland) have been notified (Art. 10 of Food Supplements Directive) by food business operators (FBOs) concerning the placing on the market of 5-HTP as food supplement. According to those MSs, the acknowledgement of these notifications is not an authorisation per se, and thus, FBOs shall verify whether or not the food / food supplement, which they intend to place on the market within the Union, falls within the scope of the Novel Food Regulation [Article 4(1)].
- Following the above, MSs are of the view that 5-HTP should be considered novel (regardless of whether it is chemically synthesised or selectively extracted from Griffonia simplicifolia seeds).

EHPM encourages its members to provide any proof of use of Griffonia simplicifolia and of 5-HTP in food supplements before 15 May 1997 to EHPM and their respective National Authorities.

EHPM will continue to monitor this dossier and share any relevant developments.

G&G have now obtained a Griffonia seed powder (not an extract) which would not be Novel.

*** June 2024 Update ***

As of May 2024, the Novel Food catalogue was updated to confirm seeds and extracts of Griffonia simplicifolia seeds up to maximum 30% of 5-HTP are not Novel in food supplements.

The extract was originally stated to be an aqueous (water) extract, however it was updated again to include hydroalcoholic extracts as well. G&G can supply this extract for customers.

Bear in mind there could still be possible restrictions in some Member States.

Mark Wood

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