



BMAA and the Brain: An Introduction

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Abstract

Increasing evidence suggests that BMAA, an unusual amino acid, may trigger neurodegenerative illness in vulnerable individuals. Produced by cyanobacteria—small, photosynthetic bacteria—BMAA can be biomagnified within the ecosystem, where it has been linked to high levels of ALS, Alzheimer’s, and Parkinson’s disease symptoms among indigenous people. Since cyanobacteria are ubiquitous, low-level BMAA exposures could occur globally. Recent studies indicate possible exposure through inhalation of cyanobacteria in desert crusts by Gulf War veterans. Although the cyanobacteria/BMAA hypothesis remains unproven, it provides a tantalizing clue to understanding—and possibly treating—some of the most serious neurological illnesses of our day.