

## Swiss Medica Aims Women's Product to Male Consumers

PMS Escape Formulation Might Be Good For Stressed-Out Men, Too! When Swiss Medica goes shopping, don't expect them to pay retail for the consumer health products they purchase. Since acquiring the O24/Sport product from insolvent German-based General Cosmetics, Swiss Medica (OTC BB: SWME) roared onto the radar screens of U.S. and Canadian pharmacy chains. Part two of their corporate strategy was the necessity of an encore product to avoid being called a "single product company." Obtaining the North American licensing rights to PMS Escape overcame that hurdle. Internutria, which marketed PMS Escape in the mid to late 1990's, sold more than \$3.6 million of the product in about 25,000 stores, for the short time after it was launched in 1996. However, a setback for Internutria's parent company, Interneuron Pharmaceuticals, Inc. (NASDAQ:IPIC), specifically a recall of Redux, forced the company to abort the launch of PMS Escape. In the same way Swiss Medica successfully revived the O24 product, lightning could strike twice in the form of PMS Escape' reintroduction. Interviews with two key PMS Escape spokeswomen helped clarify which direction Swiss Medica might run with their newly acquired product. Perhaps a PMS Escape makeover is in progress, in the same way O24/Sport morphed into the O24™ Essential Oil Pain Neutralizer? Sure, the packaging says PMS Escape and the website present the product as "a dietary supplement developed for women with normal PMS-related disturbances in mood and appetite." However, the PMS formula could delve into new territory: Not Just For Women. In other words, stressed-out men might someday soon be customers for a variation of the PMS Escape formula. One such hint came during a recent interview with Dr. Judith Wurtman, the inventor of PMS Escape (see brief bio below). She told us a revealing anecdote: "There is one gentleman who has been taking this for years. He has a very stressful job. He read about PMS Escape in his daughter's magazine. He called me and asked if he could use this. I told him, 'Sure, it's made up of a specially formulated group of natural carbohydrates.' He had his daughters buying it for him, and he started taking it. He would take it only once a day when he left work. By the time he got home from work, he felt fine. It (PMS Escape) has a cute name, but it's not restricted to women. Men can certainly be just as stressed as women. It's just not macho to do something about it." Wendy Kramer, Vice President of Swiss Medica who will be re-introducing PMS Escape to pharmacy and supermarket chains, said during a recent interview, "PMS Escape has been shown to be effective in reducing stress, irritability, food cravings and improving concentration." But, she looked beyond the immediate game plan, suggesting multiple products, "There is reason to believe that a similar formula will lend it self to a stress product, a weight loss product, or a product for feeling anxious or irritable, or a product for concentrating better." Kramer frequently emphasized throughout the interview, "These are all avenues we are going to pursue clinically with this formulation for PMS Escape." Kramer referred to Dr. Wurtman's current use of a modified formulation of the PMS Escape product as a weight loss product, "She's had quite a bit of success with it." Numerous serotonin deficiency experiments were done at MIT, and elsewhere, which previously identified broader uses for the PMS Escape formula. For example, Dr. Wurtman explained, "If you find people who are going through smoking withdrawal, and they are overeating carbohydrates, which they tend to do, it probably would help if you gave them the carbohydrates in a drink form." Wurtman underscored, "Serotonin is absolutely involved in the mood changes that occur when nicotine is withdrawn." Expansion beyond the current boundaries of the PMS Escape formula may already be past Swiss Medica's blueprint stage, although no details were offered. Serotonin Levels are the Key to PMS It was a logical choice to pursue pre-menstrual "mood and appetite" disturbances during a series of serotonin deficiency experiments at MIT. Dr. Wurtman explained the background behind her development of the PMS Escape formulation, "We did a series of experiments, first with a drug that increased serotonin. When serotonin was being increased by this drug, they (women) became less anxious, irritable, angry, craved fewer carbohydrates and could concentrate again, in other words, they felt like themselves again." Her work, in conjunction with her husband Dr. Richard Wurtman, led to the development of the use of Prozac®, which MIT patented for very severe PMS, and has since been sold under the brand-name, Sarafem®. "At the same time, we decided to just look and see whether carbohydrates themselves would have any positive impact on mild (not the raging kind of) PMS," Wurtman pointed out. "We found that women really did report an improvement in their mood and their cravings. That was really the beginning of a series of experiments that led to the development of PMS Escape." Why women? Dr. Wurtman revealed what many men have been dying to hear, "Women are more likely to experience mood changes than men, because women's brains have less serotonin to begin with, than men's brains." Hence, PMS Escape, which is made especially for women. But, serotonin bears further discussion to better understand why Swiss Medica might expand the PMS Escape formula into other vital "emotional pain" areas. Such problems are now addressed with mood-altering prescription drugs, which rake in \$19 billion annually. Serotonin is one of many different neurotransmitters in the brain. Each one of these "brain chemicals" has an important role. As the neurotransmitter most frequently related to depression, serotonin controls several critical physical and emotional functions, including the regulation of hunger, thirst, mood, breathing, sleep, confidence, attitudes and many other things. Says Dr. Wurtman, who also authored "The Serotonin Solution": "When you have enough serotonin in your brain, you have a stable emotional feeling. When you don't have enough serotonin, or it's being used up too quickly, your mood can change so you feel depressed, angry, confused, or you have difficulty focusing. You have difficulty being attentive. You feel easily distracted. You become very irritable. Sometimes, your mood goes up and down very quickly. You can also feel very anxious. In addition, you feel tire – a sort of tiredness you might feel, like it's been many days without sunlight in the winter time. It's where you can feel incredibly fatigued all over. That comes from too little serotonin. It is also involved in regulating the appetite, in not making you hungry to eat, but in turning off the appetite when you've had enough to eat. It is also involved in other physiological behaviors in the body like chronic fatigue where there might be enough serotonin so people might feel aches or their joints hurt." Serotonin Deficiency Creates Volatile Emotions Thirty years of human and animal studies demonstrate that serotonin nerve circuits encourage positive feelings, such as calmness, relaxation, increased confidence and better concentration. Serotonin neural circuits are said to help offset the emotions caused by brain dopamine and noradrenalin circuits, which promote negative emotions such as fear, anger, tension, aggression, anxiety and erratic sleep. Serotonin deficiency syndrome can manifest in many emotional and behavioral problems,

including PMS, depression, insomnia, compulsive behavior and addictions. A chronic deficit of serotonin in the nerves using it as a transmitter is what leads to the deficiency syndrome. This deficit in turn derives from various problems relating to the nutritional biochemistry of tryptophan. Wendy Kramer explains the action of PMS Escape in the context of tryptophan and increasing serotonin levels: "Tryptophan is an amino acid that is commonly found in food. When we eat certain proteins, it breaks down during digestion to give us tryptophan. Tryptophan is then converted to 5-Hydroxytryptophan (5-HTP) in the brain. It is this substance that in turn is converted to Serotonin. What PMS Escape does has little to do with any of the three. It causes an insulin response, which in turn plucks other amino acids out of the blood. Insulin does not attach to tryptophan, therefore allowing more tryptophan to cross the blood brain barrier and convert to 5-HTP and then into serotonin. In normal conditions, tryptophan is not only a small amino acid, but exists in the body in small amounts. So it has lots of competition when it comes to crossing into the brain. The Problem with Tryptophan A devastating crisis swept through the natural foods sector in the late 1980s. L-Tryptophan had emerged as the amino acid of choice because it was a health food supplement many were taking as a sleep aid. In early 1990, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) banned the sale of over the counter L-tryptophan dietary supplements because it was linked to an incurable, debilitating muscle illness, Eosinophilia-Myalgia Syndrome (EMS). Over 1500 were permanently disabled and 37 people died from contaminated batches of L-Tryptophan. A division of the Japanese petrochemical company, Showa Denko KK, had reportedly been experimenting with its purification process by genetically modifying bacteria to reduce their manufacturing costs. Later research identified the impurity, since labeled "peak E" or "strain V," which reportedly led to those tragedies. While not available as a dietary supplement, the brain requires tryptophan for "peace of mind" and better sleep. Tryptophan has a tough time crossing the blood brain barrier so it can help produce serotonin. However, a high intake of carbohydrates induces an insulin response, which then goes into the blood. The insulin response clears out the five other competing amino acids (valine, leucine, isoleucine, phenylalanine and tyrosine), but not tryptophan. In layman's terms, Wurtman said, "What insulin also does at that moment is re-arrange the pattern of amino acids in your blood so that one of those amino acids, tryptophan, gets into your brain. This also helps explain why a high-protein diet can make someone cranky. Dr. Wurtman shed light on this, "A woman who goes on one of those high protein diets may find within a couple of days a feeling that she is less calm and less content and less able to control her emotions than she was before she started the diet." The dieter might say, "I'm not hungry on the diet, but I can't stay on it anymore because I have to have carbs!" Insufficient tryptophan is making its way past the blood brain barrier, provoking a serotonin deficiency. PMS Escape Fills the Void In its simplicity, PMS Escape starts the process that results in higher serotonin levels. "The nice thing about PMS Escape is that it works faster than food," said Dr. Wurtman. "You don't have to prepare and it works faster than food. We picked the carbohydrates for their digestibility." Why not just eat a couple of bowls of steamed rice or pasta? Dr. Wurtman explained, "One of the characteristics of women with PMS is impulsiveness. One of the problems is women probably won't steam the rice, and then wait to eat it. While they're steaming the rice, they might have chocolate bars. They are going to throw food in their mouths until they feel better." Basically, PMS Escape puts a leash on the impulsiveness. "People don't have to worry about controlling the amounts they are eating," said Wurtman. "They'll take one packet, and it's enough." PMS Escape tastes pretty much like a packet of Crystal Light®, according to Wendy Kramer. "They'll never say, 'This tastes wonderful and I'll have six of them,'" Dr. Wurtman laughed, then advising, "Whereas if you tell people to even have breakfast cereal, they might eat the whole box." On a more serious note, Wurtman concluded, "What we do is tell people to have the PMS Escape, and then you'll be calmer, you'll be in control. You're impulsiveness will be under wraps. Then, you'll be able to pick and choose the other foods you're eating with the appropriate amounts." "It is important that brain serotonin be kept at an adequate level during that period of the menstrual cycle when women experience PMS," reported Dr. Wurtman and her team in a 1995 article published in the Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology. She wrote then, before developing the PMS Escape formulation, "To help maintain optimum brain serotonin levels without the use of SSRIs, which can have a variety of unwanted side effects, special dietary nutrients have been investigated and shown to be effective." From her research at MIT came PMS Escape. According to Wendy Kramer, "It (PMS Escape) should be in retail pharmacies this summer." More importantly, when will men be able to enjoy the same heightened serotonin benefits women have with this formulation? COPYRIGHT © 2007 by StockInterview, Inc. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

## About the Author

To estimate the proportion of pharmacies meeting licensing requirements and to identify factors associated with these pharmacies in urban Rawalpindi.

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