By ACSH Staff — November 14, 2001

The traditional American holiday meal, which typically includes mushroom soup, roast turkey, potatoes, green salad, fruit and pumpkin pie, is really a chemical feast of toxins and carcinogens all courtesy of Mother Nature. Even if it is all certified "organic."

That was the conclusion of the American Council on Science and Health (ACSH) in its annual "Holiday Dinner Menu". Happily, the scientists at ACSH assure us that these natural chemicals are safe. ACSH's Holiday Dinner Menu highlights the chemical carcinogens that Mother Nature has put in our food to make the point that the mere presence of a supposed cancer-causing agent whether natural or synthetic does not necessarily make that food dangerous.

As the Holiday Dinner Menu explains, in 1958 the Delaney Clause, part of an amendment to the federal Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act, banned from American food any artificial substance that could be shown to cause cancer in lab animals with no consideration of the high doses given to test animals or the minuscule and harmless amounts found in foods. Of course, Delaney did not acknowledge the presence of naturally occurring chemicals that are also rodent carcinogens.

Traces of rodent carcinogens either naturally occurring or manmade in our food supply should trigger neither fear nor regulatory action. It is a principal of toxicology that "only the dose makes the poison." Notes ACSH president Dr. Elizabeth Whelan, "Clearly, there is a lack of evidence that the abundant natural animal carcinogens in our foods cause any ill effects in humans. This lack of evidence supports the view that trace levels of man-made animal carcinogens should not be a concern to humans."

The foods on our Holiday Menu are healthful and wholesome despite the presence of Mother Nature's own carcinogens. High fruit and vegetable consumption has been found in numerous
epidemiologic studies to lower the risk of some types of cancer. As the Holiday Menu explains, we would have to eat ridiculously enormous amounts of foods containing these chemicals over long periods of time before we could ever expect them to cause cancer. Dr. Whelan reiterates that "The real benefits of eating fruits and vegetables far outweigh any hypothetical risks from consuming tiny amounts of potential carcinogens."

Those words should guide us all, individuals and regulators alike, as we assess the risks of any substance we find in our food. We should remember them, too, as we enjoy our holiday dinner and give thanks for the safest and most abundant food supply in the world.

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