

Health Panel Finds All-Natural Carcinogens Galore in Holiday Foods

By ACSH Staff — September 26, 2002

Scientists associated with the American Council on Science and Health once again have analyzed the natural foods that make up a traditional holiday dinner and once again have found that they are loaded with "carcinogens": chemicals that in large doses cause cancer in laboratory animals. None of these chemicals are made by man or added to the foods. Indeed, all of these "carcinogens" occur naturally in foods. But ACSH scientists have good news: these natural carcinogens pose no hazard to human health.

"The widespread presence of natural carcinogens in our food is clear evidence of why trace levels of man-made chemicals that cause cancer in lab animals should not be a concern," notes Dr. Elizabeth Whelan, president of ACSH.

Much of the concern about the health effects of chemicals stems from the overly broad application of the so-called Delaney amendment to the Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act. As ACSH's [Holiday Menu](#) ^[1] explains, the Delaney clause originally banned from American foods any artificial substance, whether pesticide residue or food additive, that could be shown to cause cancer in lab animals no matter how minuscule the amount found in the foods or how high the dose given to the animals.

Over the years the Delaney clause has triggered regulatory action against a number of chemicals, including food colors and the artificial sweeteners cyclamates and saccharin. These compounds are animal carcinogens at high doses, but are not suspected of causing human cancer. (Saccharin escaped a Delaney-instigated ban by the FDA only through an act of Congress.)

Usually, the chemicals examined were synthetic, since it was assumed that only man-made substances would cause cancer in laboratory animals. This, in fact, is not the case. Toxicologists have confirmed that natural chemicals, too, can be animal carcinogens when given in high doses.

"If the Delaney clause were applied to the carcinogens that occur naturally in our foods, we would have to ban much of our holiday dinner and the rest of the foods we eat all year," adds Dr. Whelan. It should not be assumed that man-made chemicals are any more dangerous than natural chemicals.

The Food Quality Protection Act of 1996 was a glimmer of light at the end of the regulatory tunnel. The act exempts pesticides from the "zero risk" provisions of the Delaney clause and demands instead a new standard of "reasonable certainty of no harm." Unfortunately, the new bill leaves standing the application of the Delaney clause's zero-risk standard to food additives, which still must pass this scientifically insupportable threshold.

ACSH's Holiday Menu highlights the chemicals and the carcinogens that Mother Nature herself has put in our food. These natural carcinogens, by and large, have been shown to cause cancer only in very high doses given over a lifetime to lab animals.

Even the latest addition to the menu acrylamide a known human and animal neurotoxin has not been linked credibly to human cancer. In fact, virtually none of the compounds listed in ACSH's menu are established human carcinogens; and, as the Holiday Menu demonstrates, we would have to eat enormous amounts of these foods over long periods of time before we could ever expect them to cause cancer. The same is true of the majority of the food additives that are now considered to be "carcinogenic" based exclusively on animal experiments.

The American Council on Science and Health strongly endorses the progress Congress has made thus far in removing pesticides from the purview of Delaney, and ACSH urges Congress to continue to apply common sense and scientific reasoning to our food-protection programs. Says Dr. Whelan, "We must continue the progress we have made in changing our food laws and particularly the Delaney clause to bring them into line with scientific reality. Removing the Delaney clause entirely from our food safety laws would be highly desirable and consistent with our modern-day understanding of food technology and toxicology."

COPYRIGHT © 1978-2016 BY THE AMERICAN COUNCIL ON SCIENCE AND HEALTH

Source URL: <https://www.acsh.org/news/2002/09/26/health-panel-finds-all-natural-carcinogens-galore-in-holiday-foods>

Links

[1] http://www.acsh.org/publications/pubID.103/pub_detail.asp