Scientists associated with the American Council on Science and Health (ACSH) find no compelling evidence that acrylamide, when consumed in foods such as French fries and bread, poses a risk of human cancer. Their conclusions are presented today in a report on acrylamide in food and its relation to human health: "Acrylamide in Food: Is It a Real Threat to Public Health? [1]"

The ACSH review and analysis, written by Dr. Joseph D. Rosen of Rutgers University, is consistent with recent findings of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), which reported the presence of acrylamide in various common foods. However, the FDA findings, according to the new ACSH report, are not directly relevant to human health.

Acrylamide is a chemical that may be formed when foods high in carbohydrates (sugars and starches) are fried or baked. ACSH responded to a recent report from the FDA detailing the levels of acrylamide in specific foods. "We are deeply concerned that Americans will worry unnecessarily about safe, nutritious foods," said Dr. Elizabeth M. Whelan, President of ACSH.

"The claim that acrylamide, found in common foods such as potatoes and bread after cooking, poses a human cancer risk is based exclusively on high dose studies in laboratory animals. There is no evidence whatsoever that humans who consume the observed levels of acrylamide increase their risk of any type of cancer," noted Dr. Whelan.

"The FDA information on levels of acrylamides in foods does nothing to facilitate the prediction of human health risks," she added. "If one concludes that acrylamide levels are 'high,' a follow-up question would be 'high compared to what?' Our diet is replete with naturally occurring chemicals that, when fed in very high doses, cause cancer in laboratory rodents. Even a 'high' level of acrylamide is insignificant compared to the cumulative exposure we have to a myriad of naturally occurring chemicals that, like acrylamide, can be categorized as 'rodent carcinogens' on the basis of laboratory tests."

ACSH nutrition director Dr. Ruth Kava added, "Simply saying that levels of one chemical in food are higher than others does not predict any potential risk to health. One must also know how much is typically consumed and the relative toxicity, if any, of the various chemicals for humans."

"Over the past thirty years, scientists have become far more sophisticated in interpreting the findings of high dose animal ingestion studies," Dr. Whelan added. "Indeed, the more we test naturally occurring chemicals present in food, the more we note that they, too, can increase cancer risk in the laboratory but we have no reason to believe they play a role in the causation of human cancer."
In anticipation of the holiday season, ACSH has once again published a typical holiday menu of natural foods from soup to nuts noting that if your holiday dinner were subject to the kinds of scrutiny that are leveled at synthetic chemicals, even foods like roast turkey and pumpkin pie might be banned!

"ACSH does not reject the role of animal testing in predicting human cancer risk, but it is important to note that animal tests on one or two species do not provide convincing evidence of human cancer risk," observed Dr. Gilbert Ross, ACSH's Medical Director.

"Food is a highly emotional subject," said Dr. Whelan, "and the sometimes-exaggerated news reports only prove that a rumor about food safety can be halfway around the world before the truth gets its boots on."

ACSH urges consumers to evaluate the news about "carcinogens" in potatoes, bread, and other food with great skepticism because there is no evidence that trace levels of chemicals in the American diet whether from natural or synthetic sources contribute to the toll of human cancer in the United States.

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