The ACSH Holiday Dinner Menu. A Terror in Every Bite!

ACSH’s Holiday Dinner Menu is our most popular publication of all time. And, how could it not be? Can any of you honestly tell me how you could not be captivated by a menu that tells you that there is a carcinogen in every bite of every item on the menu?

I thought not.

Yet, most Americans elect to take their chances and partake in the annual feast, despite knowing with absolute certainty that they will die if they have that meal. However, among the masses, there is a more evolved and enlightened group – those who choose to lead a chemical-free life. How I envy them! If only I could summon up the discipline to live this way I might even survive long enough to see the Knicks win another NBA championship (1).

But it is not to be. With a fork in one hand and a shovel in the other, I knowingly propel myself to an early grave. Those damn chemicals are gonna get me.

Fortunately, the entire US will not perish; there are groups and organizations with the foresight to forsake chemicals entirely. One such group is the Environmental Working Group (EWG). They never met a chemical that they liked. Or understood either, but let's save that for National Education Week [1] rather than ruin the upcoming festivities.
Since I'm nothing if not helpful I thought it might be a nice gesture to help EWG plan their Thanksgiving "feast" because they can't possibly be eating the crap that the rest of us fools are enjoying.

New and Improved! The ACSH Holiday Dinner Menu for Chemophobes.

1. CRUDITÉS

The choice of appetizers will be a bit limited. Below is the appetizer section of the menu with certain chemicals of interest highlighted in yellow boxes. I have taken the liberty of looking up each of these in the EWG chemical database. Of course, no self-respecting anti-chemical activist would ever consider putting any of this poison in his or her mouth.

Carrots are yummy and healthy! But they also contain aniline [2]. EWG is very concerned with, among other things, ingredients that go on your skin - cosmetics and perfumes. They took the trouble to rate a "long list with some bad actors" found in the EWG's Cosmetics Database [3]. There are 25 chemicals - the really bad actors - that received a perfect 10/10 hazard score (10 being the most dangerous). One of these is aniline. Sorry, no carrots.

But at least they'll be able to eat delicious cherry tomatoes! After all, what could possibly be
unhealthy about... oops. Benzaldehyde \[4\]. From the EWG:

- "Classified as expected to be toxic or harmful (non-reproductive organs)"
- "Risk assessment method deficiencies and data gaps"

Well, this is getting disturbing. A bunch of vegans (just guessing) not allowed to eat vegetables? Surely, celery is OK. A little caffeic acid \[5\] can't hurt you, right?

- "Possible human carcinogen"
- "Limited evidence of carcinogenicity"
- "Classified as a high human health priority"

Or maybe it can.

Well, the crudités \textit{sure turned into} crudidonts, didn't they? Let's move on.

### 2. SALAD AND NUTS

![Nut and Salad Image]

If you’re nuts about nuts, then, according to the EWG, you’re nuts. Nuts seem to contain a tiny amount of carcinogenic and hepatotoxic aflatoxins, but that’s probably a typo since we don’t see corpses strewn all over the lobby of a movie theater with Cracker Jack boxes next to them. But we can’t ignore furfural \[6\].

- "Classified as an irritant"
- "Classified as a high human health priority"
- "Possible carcinogen"
- "One or more animal studies show tumor formation at high doses"

Well, \textit{that} sucks. No nuts? At least there’s a salad. On the other hand, in addition to the already-icky caffeic acid, there’s something called methyl eugenol \[7\] in there. This is most disturbing.

- "Possible human carcinogen"
- "One or more human case studies show possible cancer findings"
- "Restricted in cosmetics"
- "257 studies in PubMed science library may include information on the toxicity of this chemical"
Well, it's a pretty fair assessment to say that the EWG Thanksgiving feast sucks so far. Maybe it will get better. Or not.

3. MAIN COURSE

Yummmmmmm! Even radical chemophobic environmentalists get hungry so you have to figure that there's a whole bunch of organic drool pouring out of their mouths right about now. But, I'm awfully sorry to report that turkey is little more than a feathered superfund site. It contains heterocyclic amines. In an EWG article called "Rethinking Cancer" [8], the following advice is given:

"And be aware that charring meat, especially red meat, can produce cancer-causing chemicals known as heterocyclic amines."

And the rest of the main course doesn't get any better. In addition to furfural, stuffing made with bread contains acrylamide [9]. Oh noooo!

- "Classified as an irritant"
- "Known human respiratory toxicant"
- "Classified as toxic or harmful"
- "Possible human carcinogen"
- "Violation of government restrictions - Banned or found unsafe for use in cosmetics"
- "Classified as a high human health priority"

Oh, well...
And you can forget the cranberry because chances are that the can is lined with a plastic made from bisphenol-A (BPA). EWG sure doesn't like BPA: “No one disputes that bisphenol A, a toxic compound widely used to line food cans and other food packaging, is polluting people.” (2) You don't want to be polluted so you better can the can.

This leaves the prime rib. You and I both know that there is going to be something wrong with it since it comes from an animal. If that's not damning enough, it contains benzene. (3)

- "Known human carcinogen"
- "Known human respiratory toxicant"
- "Human developmental toxicant - strong evidence"

Even the art history majors who pose as scientists at EWG know where this is going. There are going to be toxic and/or carcinogenic chemicals in just about everything on the table, so I'll save some time...

Every single item on the Holiday Menu contains one or more chemicals deemed to be harmful by EWG. (But there isn't a peep about alcohol, which is a known carcinogen.)

Except one...
Forget the potatoes, sweet or otherwise - instant death - but broccoli contains a g-g-g-good chemical (how can this be?) called allyl isothiocyanate (green box), which, despite that the Food Babe can neither spell or pronounce it, may prevent cancer [14]

So, I'm pleased to report that our friends at EWG will be able to at least eat something, even though the dinner may fall just short of qualifying for the cover of Martha Stewart's Living magazine. The presentation could be better.

The Environmental Working Group's Thanksgiving Feast! Bon Appétit!

NOTES:

(1) As an avid follower of the NBA and (very) occasional participant in sports betting I can tell you that Vegas has the over/under set at the year 2062. I'll take the over. The last time they won was 1973-4.

(2) Actually, we dispute this, mainly because it's wrong. See BPA Is Just As Dangerous As It Never Was [15]

(3) Benzene is seriously nasty stuff. So much that organic chemists have switched to toluene, which has similar properties but not the same cancer potential.