

Nature Makes Chemicals, Too: Eat Them for the Holidays

By ACSH Staff — November 20, 2009

Each year, the American Council on Science and Health likes to remind you that your holiday meal is absolutely filled with "carcinogenic" chemicals -- whether you're eating organic food, conventional food, meat, vegetables, or anything else. 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 the [ACSH Holiday Dinner 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 -- leading to unnecessary regulatory action against food coloring, the artificial sweeteners cyclamate and saccharin, and countless other chemicals.

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.

ACSH's [Holiday Menu](#) ^[1] 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 to lab animals over a lifetime. Eat without fear.

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The American Council on Science and Health is an independent, non-profit consumer education organization concerned with issues related to food, nutrition, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, lifestyle, the environment, and health. ACSH, directed and advised by a consortium of over 350 physicians and scientists, urges Americans to focus their efforts on things that matter -- such as maintaining a healthy body weight and not smoking -- rather than the countless pieces of nonsensical or trivial health advice that fill the news.

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