How to Reduce Amounts of Chemicals in Food: Add Chemicals

By ACSH Staff — December 22, 2009

Health Canada is suggesting that the enzyme asparaginase be added to foods like french fries and potato chips in order to reduce the relatively high amounts of the animal carcinogen acrylamide that are created during cooking.

"We should to go back to the basics and point out that acrylamide is a naturally occurring chemical that is formed when you cook high-starch food," says ACSH's Dr. Elizabeth Whelan. "It's quite ubiquitous in our food supply. The case against it is that it causes cancer when given in high doses to lab animals. Well, what else is new?"

"When I first saw this story, I thought it might be a playful, end-of-the-year parody of health scares. After further reflection I don't think it is. It's just the precautionary principle being carried to its illogical extreme. If we were to concern ourselves with everything that causes cancer in a rodent, we would have very few foods left to eat. Imagine if they knew about all the 'dangerous chemicals' listed in our holiday dinner menu."

"This is just another case of addressing a non-problem with a solution that is likely to cause more harm than the original non-problem," says ACSH's Dr. Gilbert Ross. "There is not a shred of evidence of any link between cancer in humans and acrylamide at the levels present in these foods. And yet we are going to add other chemicals to our food to metabolize it? Asparaginase is clearly effective at eliminating acrylamide, but it's also used as a chemotherapeutic agent for certain kinds of leukemia. Of course, that's at a different dose, but it's not necessarily a benign substance. This whole idea is just junk science gone wild."