

FDA Investigates Potential Carcinogen in Food

The Food and Drug Administration is looking closely at a potential carcinogen found in certain foods cooked at high temperatures.

Committed to keeping the U.S. food supply the world's safest, the FDA launched an investigation of the presence of a chemical, *acrylamide*, formed in foods that have undergone certain high-temperature cooking processes. In an effort to be open with the public, the FDA issued an initial report of "exploratory" testing on various U.S. food products. Some foods showed no acrylamide, while others revealed the chemical's presence at various levels. The FDA cautions that the results are preliminary and researchers don't know yet what, if any, impact acrylamide has on public health or cancer risk.

In April 2002, Swedish researchers released a report that found acrylamide in several fried and oven-baked foods. The FDA reports that since then, other countries including Norway, the United Kingdom, and Switzerland have similarly found this chemical in carbohydrate-rich foods that underwent high-temperature cooking.

Acrylamide is a byproduct formed in some foods during cooking above 248° Fahrenheit. It is a known carcinogen in laboratory animals, so it is considered a *potential* carcinogen in humans. Further testing is necessary, but preliminary studies on people who exposed to the chemical in the workplace did not show increased cancer risk. The exposure, however, was not from food and larger investigations are necessary.

Foods that are uncooked or cooked at lower temperatures show no or reduced acrylamide levels. The FDA has proposed an immediate, large-scale action plan to conduct further analyses of foods, determine the effect of acrylamide on human health, and to make necessary modifications to food-processing techniques to ensure the safety of our food supply. Visit the FDA website for full details of the report.

References:

United States Food and Drug Administration. Internet site: www.fda.gov. (December 2002).

Internet site: www.fda.gov/bbs/topics/ANSWERS/2002/ANS01179.html. (December 2002).