

Acrylamide

Acrylamide is a chemical substance formed when starchy foods, such as potatoes and bread, are cooked at high temperatures (above 120°C). It can be formed when foods are:

- baked
- fried
- grilled
- toasted
- roasted

Acrylamide is not deliberately added to foods – it is a natural by-product of the cooking process and has always been present in our food.

It is found in wide range of foods including:

- roasted potatoes and root vegetables
- chips
- crisps
- toast
- cakes
- biscuits
- cereals
- coffee

Potential health effects of acrylamide

Laboratory tests show that acrylamide in the diet causes cancer in animals. Scientists agree that acrylamide in food has the potential to cause cancer in humans as well. We recommend that the amount of acrylamide we all consume is reduced, as a precaution.

What the food industry is doing to reduce acrylamide

The food industry has undertaken a lot of work to identify and implement measures to reduce acrylamide levels in food. This includes developing guidance on ways to limit acrylamide formation in a variety of foods and processes. New legislation will require food business operators to put in place simple, practical steps to manage acrylamide within their food safety management systems.

How to reduce acrylamide at home

To reduce your consumption of acrylamide when preparing food at home, we advise you should:

- aim for a golden yellow colour or lighter when frying, baking, toasting or roasting starchy foods
- follow the cooking instructions on the pack when cooking packaged foods like chips and roast potatoes
- eat a healthy, balanced diet and get your [5 A Day](#) to help reduce your risk of cancer

You also need to make sure that you don't store raw potatoes in the fridge if you intend to cook them at high temperatures, such as by roasting or frying. This is because keeping raw potatoes in the fridge can lead to the formation of more free sugars in the potatoes. This process is sometimes called 'cold sweetening'.

Cold sweetening can increase overall acrylamide levels, especially if the potatoes are then fried, roasted or baked. Raw potatoes should be stored in a dark, cool place at temperatures above 6°C.

Acrylamide is formed during high temperature cooking, when water, sugar and amino acids combine to create a food's characteristic flavour, texture, colour and smell. This process is called the Maillard reaction. Long cooking times and higher temperatures form more acrylamide than short cooking times and lower temperatures.

Organisations including the World Health Organisation, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) and UK scientific advisory committees have assessed the risks posed by acrylamide.

In 2015, the EFSA published its [risk assessment of acrylamide in food](#). The assessment confirms that acrylamide levels found in food have the potential to increase the risk of cancer for people of all ages. However, it's not possible to estimate how much the risk is increased. Acrylamide in your diet could contribute to your lifetime risk of developing cancer.

As it's not possible to establish a safe level of exposure for acrylamide to quantify the risk, the EFSA used a 'margin of exposure' approach. [The margin of exposure \(MOE\) approach](#) provides an indication of the level of health concern posed by a substance's presence in food.

EFSA's Scientific Committee states that, for substances that are genotoxic and carcinogenic, a MOE of 10,000 or higher is of low concern for public health. The MOE identified in our total diet study on acrylamide have indicated a concern for public health. These range between 300 for an average adult consumer and 120 for toddlers.

Our work on acrylamide

To understand more about acrylamide and how to reduce the risk it presents we are:

- supporting food manufacturers' initiatives to reduce acrylamide in foods
- conducting and publishing annual monitoring data for acrylamide in a range of foods
- working with industry to help manufacturers comply with the new legislation
- advising people what they can do to reduce acrylamide in food they cook at home