

On Line for Food Nutrition and Health

June 1997

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PAUSE TO PONDER

CUTTING EDGE

FDA Issues National Warning on Hommus Dips and Salads Made by Cedar's Mediterranean Foods

The Food and Drug Administration on June 12, 1997 issued a nationwide warning against the purchase and consumption of hommus and other foods produced by Cedar's Mediterranean Foods, Inc., of Plaistow Road, NH. These foods may be contaminated with *Listeria monocytogenes*, an organism which can cause serious and sometimes fatal infections in infants, frail or elderly people, and others with weakened immune systems. Although healthy individuals may suffer only short-term symptoms such as high fever, severe headache, stiffness, nausea, abdominal pain and diarrhea, listeria infection can cause miscarriages and stillbirths among pregnant women.

Cedar Mediterreanan, Inc is recalling all of its Cedar's, Vita, Mr. Hommus, and Sidon brands of:

- hommus dips, including baba ghannouj
- garden lentil salad
- taboule salad
- salsa
- grape leaves

Cedar's, Vita, and Mr. Hommus brands were distributed to retail stores across the United States. Sidon brand is distributed in Canada.

To date, FDA has learned of several unconfirmed reports of serious illness that have been associated with these products. FDA is working with state and local authorities to investigate these cases and to assess the scope of this problem. The problem was discovered after laboratory sampling by the New York State Food and Agriculture Department detected the presence of *Listeria monocytogenes* in several varieties of Cedar's hommus dips. Follow up inspection of the firm's production facility indicated a number of sanitation problems. As a result, the firm has agreed to stop food production until these problems can be fully corrected.

Consumers with questions may contact the FDA at 1-800-FDA- 4010.

Source: U.S. Food and Drug Administration
<http://vm.cfsan.fda.gov/list.html>.

FDA Warns Consumers Against Dietary Supplement Products that may Contain Digitalis Mislabeled as "Plantain"

The Food and Drug Administration on June 12, 1997 warned consumers not to purchase or ingest certain dietary supplement products containing "plantain" because the products may contain Digitalis, a plant that contains powerful heart stimulants that can cause life-threatening heart reactions including cardiac arrest if ingested.

FDA has detected Digitalis in samples of raw material labeled "plantain" that has been used by various manufacturers as an ingredient in making dietary supplement products. These products may list "plantain" as one of their ingredients on the labels, and are sold with a variety of claims.

In addition, some of the suspect plantain has been distributed to retailers who sell the product in bulk for making tea or who use the product in blends of specialty teas for sale to consumers.

Plantain is a perennial weed of the genus *Plantago* which includes more than 200 widely distributed species. It is used in herbal remedies as a laxative and in poultices. Plantain is grown commercially for use in forage mixtures and for use of its seeds in bulk laxatives and birdseed. It should not be confused with the tropical banana plant *Musa paradisiaca*, the fruit Plantain which resembles a banana and is sold in some grocery stores.

The effects of *Digitalis* may include nausea, vomiting, dizziness, headache, confusion, hypotension (low blood pressure), vision disturbances and abnormal heart rate and rhythm. Persons who have experienced adverse effects associated with the use of these products should see a doctor. Consumers and health professionals can report adverse events associated with the products to FDA's MedWatch adverse event reporting line at 1-800-FDA-1088.

The FDA continues to investigate the mislabeling of raw material labeled as "plantain", and to work with manufacturers to identify any dietary supplement products that may contain *Digitalis* to ensure they are recalled from commercial channels. Consumers should read the ingredient label on dietary supplement products to see if "plantain" is listed as an ingredient.

For updated information on firms and on products that may contain *Digitalis*, consumers may call FDA's Consumer Hotline (1-800-FDA-4010), or access the "Dietary Supplements" section of the FDA "Foods" website on the FDA homepage <http://www.fda.gov/>.

The lists will be updated as more products are identified, so consumers who use plantain-containing products should check regularly.

Source: FDA Press Release. June 12, 1997.
<http://www.fda.gov/bbs/topics/NEWS/NEW00570.html>

World Health Problems by Cause of Death

The so-called "diseases of affluence" are now becoming the leading killers in the developing world as they have been in the developed world, according to an article in the May 3, 1997 issue of *The Lancet*. The article by Dr. Christopher Murray of the Harvard School of Public Health and Dr. Alan Lopez of WHO is the first of a series of four that presents the results of their study, "The Global Burden of Disease," which seeks to identify the major

health problems facing
health officials around the world.

The authors report that, despite improvements in many economies in the developing world and efforts to reduce mother and child mortality, one in four of the estimated 50 million deaths that occurred in 1990 (the year of the study) was the death of a child under age 5 years. Indeed, 98 percent of all deaths in children younger than 15 years are in the developing world. The risk of death from non-communicable causes such as heart disease, stroke and cancer is higher for adults living in low-income regions such as sub-Saharan Africa than it is for people living in wealthy developed nations. This, the authors say, may be because malnutrition early in life predisposes people to these "diseases of affluence" when they become prosperous enough to add unhealthy amounts of fat, salt and sugar to their diet.

Murray and Lopez report the following top ten causes of death worldwide:

1. Ischemic heart disease (heart attacks)
2. Cerebrovascular disease (stroke)
3. Lower respiratory infections (pneumonia)
4. Diarrheal diseases
5. Perinatal conditions
6. Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease
7. Tuberculosis (not associated with HIV infection)
8. Measles
9. Road traffic accidents
10. Cancers of trachea, bronchus and lung

Some other findings of interest: injuries account for a surprising one in 10 deaths worldwide; violence is responsible for one death in six among men living in Latin America; and more than half of the female suicides in the world, 56 percent of the total, occurred in China, where suicide is estimated to be the cause of death of almost one in four women of age 14 to 44 years.

Source: "Mortality by Cause for Eight Regions of the World: Global Burden of Disease Study." *The Lancet*. May 3, 1997. Volume 349, No. 9061, pp. 1269-76.

New Diet Drug, "Herbal Phen/Fen"

What is "Herbal Phen/Fen"? One ingredient is a Chinese medicinal herb (ephedra) that has been used for 5,000 years to treat asthma. The other is an herb (Saint John's wort) used as a substitute for the antidepressant Prozac. Taken together, they are the latest thing in weight-loss drugs. The combination of ephedra and Saint John's wort entered the competition for dieters' dollars in May, when weight-loss chain Nutri/System Inc. began selling the herb combination in tablet form in its 500 diet centers nationwide. Because the ingredients may mimic the action of the popular prescription diet-drug combination phentermine/fenfluramine, the new product is called Herbal Phen/Fen. But Herbal Phen/Fen differs from its prescription cousin in at least one important

regard: because it is composed entirely of herbs, it need not win Food and Drug Administration approval before being put on the market.

Nutri/System tested the compound on about 20 people for less than three months before starting to sell it across the country. The relative lack of testing is defended by Nutri/System executives. They say Saint John's wort has proved extremely safe in years of use and in research studies, and they are using ephedra in much lower doses than have raised concerns at the FDA.

The FDA has been looking into problems with ephedrine alkaloid, the active ingredient in ephedra, which is used in over-the-counter weight-loss products and in muscle-building sports drinks. Since 1993, the agency has received 600 reports of problems ranging from dizziness and gastrointestinal distress to heart attacks and hepatitis that were reported as being associated with use of ephedrine-containing dietary supplements. An FDA form letter reports that an advisory committee has agreed that the agency should take some action, but it is torn between banning the products entirely and establishing guidelines for their use.

Because of its side effects -- primarily a slightly elevated risk of primary pulmonary hypertension, an often-fatal lung disease -- prescription phentermine/fenfluramine is recommended for use only by people who are so obese that their weight has become a health risk.

Source: The Philadelphia Inquirer, Knight-Ridder/Tribune Business News, May 12, 1997.

Alert: CDC Reports on Cyclosporiasis Outbreaks in the United States

Since April 1997, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has received reports of outbreaks of cyclosporiasis in the United States and Canada. As of June 11, there had been 21 clusters of cases of cyclosporiasis reported from eight states (California, Florida, Maryland, Nebraska, Nevada, New York, Rhode Island, and Texas) and one province in Canada (Ontario). These clusters were associated with events (e.g., receptions, banquets, or related exposures) that occurred during March 19-May 25 and comprise approximately 140 laboratory-confirmed and 370 clinically defined cases of cyclosporiasis. In addition, four laboratory-confirmed and approximately 220 clinically defined cases have been reported among persons who, during March 29-April 5, were on a cruise ship that departed from Florida.

Fresh raspberries were served at 19 of the 21 events and were the only food in common to all 19 events, which occurred in April and May. At six of the 19 events, raspberries were the only type of berry served or were served separately from other berries; at 13 events, raspberries were included in mixtures of various types of berries. The raspberries reportedly had been rinsed in water at 10 (71%) of the 14 events for which such information is available. Guatemala has been

identified as one of the possible sources of raspberries for all eight events for which traceback data are currently available (i.e., Guatemala was the source of at least one of the shipments of raspberries that could have been used) and as the only possible source for at least one of these events and perhaps for two others for which the traceback investigations are ongoing.

Fresh raspberries were not implicated in two clusters of cyclosporiasis in Florida (persons were exposed on March 19 and April 10, 1997 in two different Florida cities). The first cluster was associated with eating mesclun (also known as spring mix, field greens, or baby greens -- a mixture of various types of baby leaves of lettuce); the specific source of the implicated mesclun has not been determined. Mesclun also is suspected as the vehicle for the second cluster.

At FDA's request, on May 30, 1997, the government of Guatemala and the Guatemalan Berries Commission announced their decision to voluntarily suspend exports of fresh raspberries to the United States (the last shipment was May 28). FDA is working with CDC, the government of Guatemala, and the Guatemalan Berries Commission to determine when exports can resume. Because of the relatively short shelf life, few, if any, fresh raspberries grown in Guatemala are available now for purchase and consumption in the United States. Cyclospora oocysts, like the oocysts of other coccidian parasites, are expected to be inactivated by temperature extremes (e.g., pasteurization or commercial freezing processes). The minimum time and temperature conditions required to inactivate Cyclospora oocysts by heating or freezing have not yet been determined.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
<http://www.cdc.gov>. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. June 13, 1997.

IN THE NEWS

National Food Safety Initiative

Food safety is a major public health challenge: millions of foodborne illnesses and thousands of food-related deaths occur annually. From the beginning, the Clinton administration has made improving the safety of the nation's food supply a top public health priority. Building on the recommendations of the vice president's National Performance Review, the president put in place new science-based hazard prevention systems for seafood, meat and poultry. In late 1995, the administration issued new rules to ensure seafood safety. In July 1996, President Clinton announced new regulations to modernize the nation's meat and poultry inspection system for the first time in 90 years. The new Early Warning System will gather critical scientific data to further improve these prevention systems. In August 1996 President Clinton signed the Food Quality Protection Act, a comprehensive overhaul putting in place reforms that the administration had urged since 1993. These reforms will ensure health and safety for American families through a more protective, more stringent health-based standard plus special new provisions to protect the health of infants

and children from pesticide risks. Last August, President Clinton also signed a new safe drinking water law that strengthens protections to ensure that American families have clean, safe tap water -- improvements that the Administration has called for since September 1993.

More information on the National Food Safety Initiative Program is available at <http://vm.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/fs- toc.html>.

Source: <http://www.fda.gov/opacom/foodsafety/fsfact.htm>.

THE REST OF THE STORY

Census Bureau Launches 10-Year Study to Follow Effects of Welfare Reform Legislation

The Commerce Department's Census Bureau this week begins the first phase of its new Survey of Program Dynamics (SPD) to help policy-makers evaluate the impact of the welfare reform legislation that took effect on August 22, 1996. "This survey will provide invaluable insight into the long-term effects of these reforms on the U.S. welfare system, as well as the social, economic and demographic impacts these changes will have on families, adults and children," said William M. Daley, Secretary of Commerce. The survey will include data collected before the beginning of welfare reform and data collected after the reform legislation went into effect. The SPD will measure program eligibility, access and participation in the full range of welfare programs. It will measure the income, services and benefits received from programs in addition to employment, earned income and income from other sources. Users of the data will be able to track welfare dependency, the beginning and end of periods of welfare assistance, factors that may be causes of such periods, and the impact the changes will have on families, adults and children over time.

Source: <http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/cb97-73.html>.

UPCOMING CONFERENCES

"Take Charge of Your Health" Satellite Series for Women

The Alabama Department of Public Health will be presenting, free of charge, two live satellite conferences featuring the most current information on women's health. The conferences are for women of all ages and those who work or live with women. Dates and descriptions of the conferences are listed below. Taping these teleconferences for educational purposes is encouraged. To order the series at \$25 per tape, call the Video Communications Division at 334-206- 5618. Please also contact the Video Communications Division to request a fax of their evaluation form. For technical assistance during set-up and broadcast times only, call 1- 800-392-6671. For additional information, contact Miriam Gaines, at 334-206-5226.

The Alabama Department of Public Health Presents "Take Charge of Your Health: A Satellite

Conference Series for Women". ALL TIMES ARE LISTED IN CENTRAL TIME.

June 17, 1997 (Tuesday) 12:30 p.m. - 2 p.m. (Set-up noon- 12:30). TOPIC: Osteoporosis and Diabetes. For C Band: Galaxy

9 (G9) - 123 West- Transponder 2- Channel 2 -Downlink frequency 3740 MHz -Audio 6.2-6.8- Horizontal polarity. For

KU Band: SBS 6 (B6) - 74 West- Transponder 14 - Channel 14 - Downlink frequency 12043.5 MHz- Audio 6.2-6.8 - Vertical polarity.

July 15, 1997 (Tuesday) 12:30 p.m. - 2 p.m. (Set-up noon- 12:30). TOPIC: Cancer and Heart Disease. For C Band: Galaxy

9 (G9) - 123 West- Transponder 2- Channel 2 -Downlink frequency 3740 MHz -Audio 6.2-6.8 Horizontal polarity. For

KU Band: SBS 6 (B6) - 74 West- Transponder 15 - Channel 15 - Downlink frequency 12068 MHz- Audio 6.2-6.8 - Vertical polarity.

PAUSE TO PONDER

"Genius, in truth, means little more than the faculty of perceiving in an unhabitual way."
-William James

"Creation is always preceded by chaos."
-Biblical Truth

"Many of the things you can count, don't count. Many of the things you can't count, really count."
-Albert Einstein

HOW WOULD YOU HANDLE THIS QUESTION?

Q: Where can I locate information about restaurant labeling and health claims?

A: A comprehensive web site is the FDA Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition.
<http://vm.cfsan.fda.gov/~frf/qatext2.html>

Q: If someone asks me what "functional foods" are, how can I simply respond?

A: Functional foods are those that encompass potentially healthful products, including any modified food or food ingredient that may provide a health benefit beyond the traditional nutrients it contains (Nutrition Reviews, November 1996). Other terms you may hear used are "designer foods," "nutraceuticals" and "medical foods." Basically, functional foods may provide an additional physiological benefit against disease or promote health. One example: Soy-containing foods

often are referred to as functional foods. Besides just providing nutrients, preliminary evidence suggests that soy-containing foods may help reduce the risk of heart disease and certain types of cancer.

RESEARCH FROM MSU

Dr. Joseph J. Schroeder, Department of Food Science and Human Nutrition

Traditionally we have thought of lipids as components of cell membranes and as fuel molecules; yet, lipids are the most structurally diverse class of nutrients with more than 1000 distinct forms of lipids in plant and animal cells. Why are so many different types of lipids needed in cells? The answer is that many lipids serve as distinctive signals to regulate cell behavior including cell growth and cell death.

Professor Jay Schroeder and associates in his laboratory at MSU are studying the most diverse family of lipids, the sphingolipids. These lipids were named after the Sphinx of Greek mythology because of their puzzling functions. Dr. Schroeder's group is helping to unravel the functions of these lipids. For example, one project has discovered that the sphingolipid sphingosine can induce suicide in breast cancer cells in culture.

Though it is too early to be certain, Dr. Schroeder's group believes that once the mechanisms of action of sphingosine and other sphingolipids are understood, it may be possible to develop specific sphingolipids as drugs to treat breast cancer and other diseases. Furthermore, it may be possible to specify dietary intakes of certain sphingolipids to optimize health and prevent disease.

PROGRAMMING

Using the Internet

Have you ever thought that the web was a tangle of Technology? I have! Until recently the Web seemed like a nice idea but - there are issues. No equipment, no training, no time, mileage is due today! It does not seem necessary for my target audience. Take a moment and think, where am I and where do I want to be relative to computer and internet expertise?

Did you know that in 1984 that more than 20% of jobs used computers and in 1996 that more than 50% of jobs used computers? What is predicted for 2010? The internet is one way our computers become more useful - more than simply word processing.

To get a start on Web access, I called Mike Jenson. He actually hooked me up to Netscape and I

then took an Internet course.. (to be continued).

Provided by: Cathy Pisano, Macomb County MSU Extension.

RESOURCES

Cardiovascular Health Notes

Cardiovascular Health Notes is published four times each year by the Resource Center for Cardiovascular Health, a project of the Michigan Public Health Institute and the Michigan Department of Community Health. The mission of the center is to expand the statewide effort to reduce cardiovascular disease by developing and disseminating educational materials, providing training and consultation, and conducting research. The newsletter includes several research briefs and information on resources. The March 1997 issue contains a special article on "Dietary Factors and Hypertension."

The March 1997 issue of the newsletter can be downloaded as an Adobe Acrobat file from the Resource Center for

Cardiovascular Health web site: <http://pilot.msu.edu/user/mphi/cardio/index.htm>. The newsletter is also available through a faxback system; phone (517) 349-2761 and request document 14397 (Volume 1, No.4, March 1997 issue).

Resources for Rural Citizens

Government statistics show that the leading cause of death and injury in the United States for people ages 6 to 28 is motor vehicle crashes, and in 1994, rural areas represented 58 percent of the nation's traffic-related fatalities. Reasons for higher numbers of fatalities in rural areas include a less-informed population and attitudes that precautions, such as wearing safety restraints, are not necessary or will actually be more harmful in an accident. Contact the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration at (202) 493-2062 (fax) for information on obtaining the following resources that can be distributed to help inform people and change attitudes so that fewer traffic injuries and deaths will occur.

"Protecting Your Newborn" -- this 26-minute video and training manual can be used to inform parents how to properly restrain infants and children, especially in a vehicle with airbags.

"Kids Aren't Cargo" -- posters and hangtags with this message are available to remind drivers not to transport any passengers in a pickup truck's cargo bed.

"Sudden Impact" -- this 28-page fact book discusses occupant protection.

"Three Ways to Keep a Friend Alive" -- this brochure offers three proven methods to prevent friends from drinking and driving.

"National Standard Curriculum for Bystander Care" -- this report describes a program for effective bystander actions in rural highway crashes to give victims a better chance for survival.

Profile of Michigan Volunteers

The MSU Institute for Public Policy and Social Research (IPPSR) recently published "Helping Others: A Profile of Michigan Volunteers." The report offers some interesting perspectives on the relationships between geography, religion, income and education level and volunteerism. Hard copies of the report are available for \$2, but it is also available on the web. The URL is: <http://www.ssc.msu.edu/~ippsr/soss/97-22bas.htm>. The IPPSR State of the State Survey home page is: <http://www.ssc.msu.edu/~ippsr/soss/>.

Source: Cheryl D. Howell (e-mail: howell@msue.msu.edu).

Making Bone Mass Come Alive

Melinda Hemmelgarn of the University of Missouri reports that the National Dairy Council has a great sheet of instructions on how to measure flour to represent bone mass at various age levels. She used this approach with a group of middle school students and they seemed to like it. Using the instructions, she put flour in plastic bags and told them that when they were at different ages, if they were to be ground up in a blender and their bones separated out, this is how much would be in their bodies. She reports that although this sounds gross, the kids loved it. She explained that the way to go from the amount of bone mass you had when you were 5 to the bone mass you hope to have as an adult is to eat and drink foods rich in calcium.

Source: Melinda Hemmelgarn, M.S.,R.D., Associate State Nutrition Specialist Coordinator, Resource Network, University of Missouri (email: hemmelgm@ext.missouri.edu).

PAUSE TO PONDER

"To doubt everything or to believe everything are two equally convenient solutions; both dispense with the necessity of reflection."

- Jules Henri Poincare

Please provide feedback on the content areas and send any items you would like included in this newsletter to Carol Wruble at the Food and Nutrition Information Center--fax to 517-353-1633, e-mail wrublec@msue.msu.edu or phone 517-353- 9331.

Michigan State University Extension

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