

# Hosting for the holidays without serving up toxic chemicals

## How to assemble a safer, healthier charcuterie board

It's easy to make your friends think you're the host with the most this holiday season with an impressive **charcuterie**



**board** – assorted snack foods assembled on a large tray, platter or cutting board. The only catch? Toxic chemicals may be hiding in some of those treats, since charcuterie board mainstays like cured meat and dried fruit, and wild-card additions like hummus, can all contain health-harming ingredients.

### Cured meat

Foods like **salami and sausage** – the centerpiece of most charcuterie boards – are often made with **nitrites and nitrates**, which add color and prolong shelf life. But these chemicals increase the risk of cancer.

It's best to make even naturally cured meat an occasional food, not a regular part of your diet. Consider going vegetarian and skipping the meat entirely or choosing a plant-based option.

### Two or three kinds of cheese

Besides cured meat, cheese is the other highlight of a typical charcuterie board. Most cheese doesn't score well in our **Food Scores** database, which ranks products for their nutritional value, as well as processing and

ingredients of concern. The vast majority of cheese tends to be high in calories, saturated fat and sodium.

### **Crackers or small rounds of bread**

Crackers and bread can contain **potassium bromate**, a chemical leavening agent on EWG's **dirty dozen list of food additives**. It's classified by California as a known carcinogen and by an international cancer research agency as a possible human carcinogen. To avoid potassium bromate, check ingredients labels and our **Food Scores** database.

Look for organic crackers made without added sugar for the most nutritious ones that have the fewest health concerns.

### **Jam or jelly**

A dollop of jam and jelly on your charcuterie board may not contain lots of unhealthy food additives, but in many cases, it is nearly pure sugar – corn syrup and high fructose corn syrup. One type of grape jelly, for instance, is 65 percent sugar by weight and contains three teaspoons of added and natural sugar per serving.

Bottom line: Load up your snack board with less sugary foods.

### **Hummus**

You can place a small bowl of **hummus on your platter**, drizzled with a little olive oil and sprinkled with paprika. Take care choosing your hummus, though.

EWG's **analysis** of this popular food found high levels of the weedkiller glyphosate in many store brands. But the levels varied considerably. Although most organic samples contained some glyphosate, the levels were much lower than the non-organic options.