

Nutritional Nuggets

Westchester County Health Department

Andrew J. Spano, Westchester County Executive
County Board of Legislators

Joshua Lipsman, MD, MPH, Commissioner

(914) 813-5000

VOLUME III

Trans Fat & Your Health - What You Need to Know



Trans fats and trans fatty acids have received a lot of attention in the media recently because of their relationship to heart disease. What are trans fats? Do they jeopardize health?

Trans fatty acids are formed when vegetable oils are hydrogenated, a process that solidifies liquid fat and helps extend a product's shelf life. Trans fats act like saturated fat in the body by increasing LDL ("bad") cholesterol. Trans fats may also decrease HDL ("good") cholesterol. Scientific reports have confirmed that trans fats can increase the risk of coronary heart disease, which affects almost 13 million Americans and contributes to more than 500,000 deaths each year.

Trans fat is often in the same foods as saturated fat. Sources include snack foods and baked goods made with "partially hydrogenated vegetable oil" or "vegetable shortening." Partially hydrogenated vegetable oils provide about three-fourths of the trans fatty acids in the U.S. diet. Products likely to contain trans fats include microwave popcorn, some margarines, crackers, cakes, cookies, candy, salad dressings, snack foods and other

processed foods made with or fried in partially hydrogenated vegetable oils. Trans fatty acids also occur naturally in animal products such as beef, pork, lamb and dairy products, but in very small amounts.

Typically, the harder the margarine or cooking fat, the more trans fat it contains. Look for the words "**partially hydrogenated**," "**hydrogenated**," and "**vegetable shortening**" on the ingredient list as an indication that a food contains trans fat. The sooner these words appear on the list, the more abundant trans fats are relative to the product's other ingredients. It is also important to remember that many products sold at fast food restaurants are fried in oil or shortening high in trans fatty acids.

New nutrition labeling law

After more than 10 years of debate, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) announced in July 2003 that food manufacturers will be required to include the amount of trans fatty acids on the Nutrition Facts panel. Food labels currently have information about saturated fat, total fat and cholesterol, but there is no way to determine trans fat content. Trans fat will not have to be listed if the total fat is less than 0.5 grams per serving and no claims are made about fat, fatty acids or cholesterol content. If this is the case, a footnote will be added stating that the food is "not a significant source of trans fat."

The new FDA regulations will take effect on January 1, 2006, allowing manufacturers 2 ½

years to phase in the change. Manufacturers can implement the change more quickly, and in fact, many are already listing trans fat content.

The amount of trans fat will appear on the nutrition label directly below the line for saturated fat.

% Daily Value (%DV) is a guideline that shows you the percent (or how much) of the recommended daily amount of a nutrient is in a serving of food. For labeling purposes, the FDA set 2,000 calories as the reference amount for calculating %DVs. By using the %DV, you can tell if the food is high in a particular nutrient - those with 5%DV are considered to be low in the nutrient while foods with 20%DV or more are high. Even if you don't consume 2,000 calories a day, %DV can still be used as a frame of reference. %DVs are listed on the Nutrition Facts panel for saturated fats and cholesterol but there is no %DV for trans fat because the FDA currently does not have enough information to establish recommendations. Research is underway to develop these guidelines.

The FDA estimates that the average daily intake of trans fat in the U.S. is about 5.8 grams per day. Experts recognize that it is not possible to remove trans fat entirely from the diet because elimination of dairy products and meats would be necessary.

Manufacturers of dietary supplements will also be required to list trans fat on the Supplement Facts panel if their product contains more than trace amounts (0.5gram) of trans fat. Energy and nutrition bars are examples of dietary supplements that often have trans fatty acids.

What can you do to limit trans fats in the diet?

Until the new regulations take effect, you can:

- Look for processed foods made with unhydrogenated oil rather than hydrogenated

oil or saturated fat. Heart-healthy alternatives include monounsaturated fats (olive and canola oil) and polyunsaturated fats (soybean, corn, sun flower oils and foods like nuts and fish).

- Use margarine instead of butter. Choose soft margarines (liquid, tub or spray varieties) over harder stick forms.
- Avoid commercially baked goods, fried fast foods and french fries. These foods are typically high in trans fats. Commercial shortening and deep-frying fats are made by hydrogenation and contain trans fatty acids.
- Limit fat in your diet to 30% of your total caloric intake and saturated fat to less than 10% of total calories. If you don't eat a lot of fat, you won't be consuming a lot of trans fats.



Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size 1 cup (228g)	
Servings Per Container 2	
Amount Per Serving	
Calories 260	Calories from Fat 120
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 13g	20%
Saturated Fat 5g	25%
Trans Fat 2g	
Cholesterol 30mg	10%
Sodium 660mg	28%

Keep an eye out for the new label

With the changes in nutrition labeling, consumers will have additional information to make heart-healthy food choices that could lower their intake of trans fat. The FDA estimates that by 2009 (three years after the effective date of the new regulations), trans fat labeling will prevent from 600 to 1,200 cases of Coronary Heart Disease and between 250 and 500 related deaths each year.