

Trans Fat

Artificial trans fat—in cookies, French fries, doughnuts, fried chicken, and many other foods—is the most harmful fat (on a gram-for-gram basis) in the food supply. Trans fat has been causing about 50,000 fatal heart attacks annually. Some major food manufacturers, and many smaller ones, are eliminating or reducing artificial trans fat in their foods. Unfortunately, many other restaurants and food manufacturers have not switched to healthier oils. Now is the time for cities, states and federal governments to take action to completely eliminate trans fat from our food.



According to the U.S. Dietary Guidelines, Americans should eat less than 2 grams of trans fat per day.

The average American adult has been consuming 5.6 grams a day. How much trans fat are you consuming?

What is trans fat?

Most of the trans fat Americans consume is artificial trans fat that comes from partially hydrogenated oil. Partial hydrogenation is a process in which hydrogen is added to an oil to make it more solid, like margarine or shortening.

Why is trans fat so bad for you?

There are “good” fats and there are “bad” fats in our food supply. Monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats (such as olive, canola, soybean and corn oils) are the “good” ones that help lower the “bad” LDL cholesterol. Saturated fat and trans fat are the “bad” fats that raise LDL cholesterol. But trans fat is doubly bad because it decreases HDL, the “good” cholesterol. Researchers at the Harvard School of Public Health estimate that trans fat causes 72,000 to 228,000 heart attacks, including roughly 50,000 fatal ones, per year.¹

Trans fat also promotes diabetes. All told, artificial trans fat, on a gram-for-gram basis is the most harmful fat of all.

**Gram-for-gram,
trans fat is the
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Large food processors are switching oils. What about restaurants?

Starting in January 2006 all Nutrition Facts labels on packaged foods had to list trans fat. The labeling regulation stimulated many food processors to replace partially hydrogenated oil with healthier oils. However, restaurants, which do not have Nutrition Facts labels, have been slower to eliminate trans fat. While some of the biggest chains, such as Wendy’s, KFC, and Ruby Tuesday, as well as numerous smaller restaurants and national food-service companies have greatly reduced, if not eliminated, the amount of trans fat in their products, the majority of restaurants have not switched to healthier oils.

Reference

1. Mozaffarian D, Katan MB, Ascherio A, Stampfer MJ, Willett WC. Trans fatty acids and cardiovascular disease. N Engl J Med. 2006 Volume 354:1601-1613

Is trans fat banned anywhere?

In early 2007, New York City and Philadelphia passed laws largely eliminating artificial trans fat from restaurants. In May 2007, Montgomery County, Maryland passed a similar law, followed by Brookline, Massachusetts; King County (Seattle) Washington; Nassau, Westchester and Albany Counties, New York; Boston, Massachusetts; Baltimore, Maryland; Stamford, Connecticut; Cambridge, MA, and most recently California. Many other states, cities, and counties have similar pending legislation (see www.cspinet.org/nutritionpolicy for legislative updates). In 2004, Denmark became the first nation to virtually ban partially hydrogenated oils and largely eliminate artificial trans fat from the diet.

What should governments do?

State and local governments need to pass laws to get trans fat out of restaurants. Voluntary programs don't work. New York City tried to persuade restaurants to eliminate trans fats, but a year-long education campaign failed—few if any restaurants had switched to healthier oils. Congress or the Food and Drug

Are healthy alternatives available?

Many healthy trans-fat-free oils, such as soy, corn, canola, safflower, and sunflower oils, are available and can easily replace partially hydrogenated frying oil. When harder fats are needed to make piecrusts and other baked goods, trans-fat-free margarines and shortenings can be used. Even Crisco, the quintessential solid shortening made with partially hydrogenated oil, now contains less than 0.5g of trans fat per serving.

Are replacement oils more expensive?

Most alternative oils should not affect the price of menu items. Though some are slightly more expensive than partially hydrogenated oils, many restaurants have found that they have a longer fry-life.

50,000

The number of fatal heart attacks annually caused by trans fat.

**Government,
at all levels,
should pass
laws
banning
trans fat
from
restaurants.**

For more information, go to www.cspinet.org/nutritionpolicy or call Julie Greenstein at 202-777-8331.

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