

THE TRUTH ABOUT TRANS FATS



What are trans fats?

Trans fats are formed from liquid vegetable oils during a process called hydrogenation. This process helps products stay fresh longer without tasting bad.

Sources of trans fats in the diet

Most of the trans fats we eat are found in foods like vegetable shortenings, some types of margarine, crackers, cookies, baked goods, snack foods and other foods that contain “partially hydrogenated oils.” Some foods, like meat and dairy products, naturally have a little trans fat.

Why should I be concerned about trans fats?

Studies show that trans fat raises the level of LDL cholesterol (the “bad” cholesterol) in the blood. Too much trans fat may also reduce the level of HDL cholesterol (the “good” cholesterol) in the blood. These two cholesterol changes in your blood may increase your chances of getting heart disease.

Spotting trans fats in foods

The amount of trans fats is not required to be listed on food labels until January 2006. In the mean time, you can find out if foods have trans fats by reading the ingredient list. Look for the words “hydrogenated” and “partially hydrogenated” on the ingredient label to see if the food has trans fat in it.



Should I lower the amount of trans fat in my diet?

It is most important to eat less total calories from fat. If you lower your total fat intake you will get less saturated fat and trans fat in your diet. This will improve your diet overall.

Tips to help lower total fat, saturated fat and trans fat:

- Use liquid vegetable oils like canola, olive, soybean, corn oils or cooking spray instead of solid fats.
- Choose tub, liquid margarine or vegetable oil spreads with liquid vegetable oils on the ingredient label instead of butter, lard, fatback, solid shortening and stick margarine, when possible.
- Buy light, low fat or fat free margarine.
- Eat less cookies, cakes, pastries, crackers, potato chips and snack chips.
- Substitute applesauce for part of the fat in brownies and quick breads.

The bottom line...

Following the Food Guide Pyramid will help you choose a healthy diet: more whole grain foods, vegetables and fruit. Eating more of these foods will lower your total fat intake. This can reduce your risk of heart disease, diabetes and some cancers, as well as help you manage your weight.



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Adapted from: “Trans fat: Should you be concerned?”, Oregon State University Extension Home Economics, <http://oregonstate.edu/dept/ehe/nutrition/transf.html>

Additional References: (1) “The Good, the Bad, and the Trans Fatty Acids”, Texas Agriculture Extension Service, http://fcs.tamu.edu/food_and_nutrition/nutrifacts/issue11.PDF (2) “Questions and Answers about Trans Fat Nutrition Labeling,” International Food Information Council, <http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/qatrans2.html>

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