



Trans-parent

Now We Can See You

by John Fairchild

Where have you been hiding? I have never heard of you and now you are constantly in the media. How long have you been hiding in my food? How much damage have you done over all these years that I have been trying so hard to live a healthy lifestyle? Now that you have been brought out from the shadows, I am going to be aware of all the places you may hide from me and I won't let you affect my health anymore.

What are Trans Fats?

Trans fats are formed when vegetable oils are hardened to form margarine or shortening, called hydrogenation. Many manufacturers use trans fats to reduce costs, improve the shelf life of certain products and improve taste and texture of their product. Trans fatty acids (trans fats) were once seen as a healthy alternative to the high amount of saturated fats found in butter.

Are There Negative Effects from Trans Fats?

It is estimated that the average adult intake of trans fats in the United States is approximately five to six grams per day. Experts agree that saturated fats can be beneficial for the human body when consumed in moderation. They do not say the same about trans fats. It is recommended to keep trans fats out of your intake as much as possible. The FDA has confirmed a relationship between the intake of trans fats and an increased risk of coronary heart disease (CHD). According to 2003 statistics from the American Heart Association (AHA), CHD is the single leading cause of death in America, which accounts for 479,305 deaths. Many other health organizations have reports stating that consumption of trans fats contribute to increased LDL (bad) cholesterol.

Partially Hydrogenated vs. Hydrogenated

If a product is fully hydrogenated it would be too solid for most uses. To keep margarines and shortenings softer and easier to use, partial hydrogenation is used. This is when the unhealthy trans fats are formed. Fully hydrogenated oils do not contain trans fats. New products from Crisco are coming to the market that can blend several oils together and then

fully hydrogenate them without creating a trans fat. Crisco uses several unsaturated oils (soy and sunflower) blended with cottonseed oil to produce a soft texture product.

Partial hydrogenation creates a semi solid material raising a product's melting point, which is extremely useful for baking. Trans fats are man made or processed fats that are developed when hydrogen is added to the oil and then pressurized in the presence of a metal catalyst, hence the term hydrogenation. This process changes the chemical structure of a fat and some atoms end up on different sides of the fatty acid chain. Trans in Latin means "across". In a fatty acid, the hydrogen atoms are on the same side of the acid chain. Hydrogenation re-configures these bonds. The body metabolizes trans fats differently in the liver than it does for natural fatty acids, therefore causing some health risks.

How Do I Locate Trans Fats on the Food Label?

You can thank the government for finally stepping up and providing some good solid information in helping us with the never ending food label confusion. If you haven't heard about the new labeling laws the government set forth, you haven't been paying attention to the products you are buying.

Starting in January 2006, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) published a final rule requiring all food manufacturers to list trans fatty acids on the product's food label. This is the first major change on the label since 1993.

Trans fats will be listed under the total fat section on the food label. It is recommended to keep trans fats and saturated fats to minimal levels. There is no Daily Value percentage (%DV) for trans fats.

Saturated fats %DV should be below 20%DV with healthier recommendations of 5%DV or lower. You will come across products that will have 0 grams trans fats but will have partially hydrogenated oils in the ingredient list. The FDA final rule allows companies to not list trans fats if the product contains 0.5 grams or less per serving size. Check the serving size and how many servings are in the package to find out the total amount in the whole carton, bag, or can. If a product has 0.5 grams per serving and the container has six servings, you could consume three grams of trans fats if you eat the whole container. This would be a high intake of trans fats in anyone's diet. "Shortening" listed on the food label will also indicate some trans fats are present in the food.

Make Wiser Choices

Vegetable oils (except coconut and palm), tub or spray margarines (these contain a lower combined amount of saturated and trans fats), low fat dairy products, leaner cuts of meats, fresh fish, whole grains, and of course colorful fruits and vegetables. Limit your intake of egg yolks, bagged snacks, pastries, fried food and most fast food.

Food Label - Total Fat, Saturated Fat and Trans Fat		
<i>Product</i>	<i>Serving size</i>	<i>Trans fats g</i>
Butter	1 tbsp.	.3
Margarine -stick	1 tbsp.	2.8
Margarine-soft tub	1 tbsp.	.6
French fries	Medium	8
Doughnut	1	5
Candy Bar	1	3
Pound Cake	1 slice	4.5
Fried onion appetizer	1	18

Trans fats are also found in nature in foods of animal origin including butter, milk products, beef and cheese. These foods provide vital minerals and nutrients and should not be totally eliminated from the diet in order to avoid their trans fats. Additionally they can be found in foods such as crackers, cookies, candies, fried foods, baked goods, bagged snack foods, and most processed foods that have partially hydrogenated vegetable oil in the ingredient list.

Some major food manufacturers have already taken some necessary steps to cut down or eliminate trans fats in some of their products. Now that we see and understand the trans fat story, can we embark in the journey of leading a healthier life? It's our choice.



John Fairchild is an Adult Weight Management Counselor. A Graduate from Cedar Crest College in Nutrition, John is also a Certified Trainer with the National Academy of Sports Medicine and was the Director of Fitness at several fitness centers on the east coast. He holds a Fitness Expert Certification and has produced and recorded various exercise videos (originator of Kickaerobox) and DVD's. His special interest is in nutritional counseling where he holds an Adult Weight Management Counselor certification with the American Dietetic Association. You previously saw him as one of the trainers on the Dr. Phil Weight Loss Challenge on NBC and on Entertainment Tonight. His recent talents paved a path for him to be an expert writer for ezinearticles.com. For more information visit: www.phillyfitmagazine.com.