

Trans Fatty Acids or "Trans Fat"

Having proper dietary habits and eating right are important things everybody should do to help them down the road towards a long and healthy life. Recently scientists and researchers have discovered new information about trans fatty acids, or "trans fat" as it is commonly called, including its role in raising cholesterol levels and the probability of developing coronary heart disease.

As a consumer, the most important thing to know about trans fat is that it raises low-density lipoprotein (LDL or "bad") cholesterol. An elevated LDL blood cholesterol level increases your risk of developing heart disease. Heart disease is the leading killer of both men and women in the U.S.

What is trans fat?

There are two sources of trans fat, also known as trans fatty acids:

- **Naturally-occurring trans fat** is produced in the gut of some grazing animals. That is why small quantities of trans fat can be found in animal products like milk, milk products and meat.
- **Industrially-produced trans fat** is formed during food processing. This type of trans fat is created when hydrogen is added to vegetable oil (a process called hydrogenation) to make it more solid. About half of the trans fat Americans consume is industrially-produced, and partially hydrogenated oils are the main source of industrially-produced trans fat in the U.S.

How is trans fat made?

Trans fat is made when hydrogen is added to vegetable oil during a process called "hydrogenation." This process was developed during the early 1900s by a German chemist named Wilhelm Normann.

Today, trans fat created in the hydrogenation process is used while cooking. Trans fat helps increase the shelf life of processed foods and provides more flavor stability than other cooking fats.

There is also a small amount of trans fat that occurs naturally. This natural trans fat is primarily found in animal-based foods like meat and dairy items.

Which foods contain trans fat?

Trans fats can be found in many of the same foods as saturated fats. These can include:

- Snack foods (such as microwave popcorn)
- Frozen pizza
- Crackers, cookies, cakes, frozen pies and other baked goods
- Vegetable shortenings and margarine

- Refrigerated dough products (such as biscuits and cinnamon rolls)
- Ready-to-use frostings
- Some animal products like milk, milk products and meat (occurs naturally in small amounts)

Is trans fat good or bad for you?

There are many different kinds of fat, and while unsaturated fats (monounsaturated and polyunsaturated) are beneficial when consumed in moderation, saturated fat and trans fat are not very good for you.

Studies have shown that people who have diets with high levels of trans fat content also have high levels of low-density lipoprotein (LDL), or bad cholesterol. People with high levels of bad cholesterol have an increased chance of developing coronary heart disease.

Choose Fats Wisely

Use the Nutrition Facts Label, located on the back or side of the food package or container, as your tool for reducing trans fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol in your diet-- it may help decrease your risk of developing heart disease. Here are a few additional tips:

- Keep trans fat consumption as low as possible by limiting foods that contain industrially-produced sources of trans fats. Trans fat has no percent Daily Value (%DV), so use the number of grams (g) as a guide when looking at the Nutrition Facts Label.
- Check the Ingredient List on the food package for partially hydrogenated oils. The Nutrition Facts Label can state 0 grams of trans fat if the food product contains less than 0.5 grams of trans fat per serving. Thus, if a product contains partially hydrogenated oils then it might contain small amounts of trans fat even if the label says 0 grams of trans fat.
- Choose foods low in saturated fat and cholesterol for a healthy diet. When comparing foods, choose the food with the lower %DV of saturated fat and cholesterol. As a quick rule of thumb: 5 percent DV or less is low and 20 percent DV or more is high.
- Cook and bake with vegetable oils (liquid or spray) instead of solid fats, like solid shortenings, butter or lard. Choose oils that are higher in monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats (e.g., canola oil and olive oil).
- Try baking, steaming, grilling or broiling instead of frying.
- Eat foods that contain healthier fats, such as nuts (e.g., walnuts and almonds), seeds (e.g., sunflower and pumpkin), olives and avocados.
- Choose low-fat or fat-free dairy products and lean cuts of meat and skinless poultry.
- Eat more seafood and choose it in place of some meat and poultry.
- Get plenty of foods that are naturally low in fat, such as whole grains, fruits and vegetables.

- When eating out, remember to ask which fats are being used in the preparation of the food you are ordering. Ask to see nutrition information, which is now available in many fast food or chain restaurants, and choose a lower-fat option.

Resources

- American Heart Association: www.heart.org/en/healthy-living/healthy-eating/eat-smart/fats/trans-fat
- Choose MyPlate: www.choosemyplate.gov
- Nutrition.gov: www.nutrition.gov
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; National Institutes of Health, National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute: <http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/>
- U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA): www.fda.gov/food/food-additives-petitions/trans-fat

Some information on this page was gathered from documents on the website for the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The site is located at www.fda.gov.

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