

The Truth about *Trans* Fats

What is *trans* fat?

Trans fat is naturally present in small amounts in meat and dairy products. However, the main source of *trans* fat in the diet is from partially hydrogenated (hardened) oils found in foods such as stick margarine, lard, shortening, non-dairy creamer, fried foods, and some baked goods (e.g. cookies and pastries).

Why are *trans* fat bad for me and my family?

The main concern with *trans* fat is that it raises the risk of heart disease by increasing LDL-cholesterol (bad cholesterol) and lowering HDL-cholesterol (good cholesterol).

Why are partially hydrogenated oils used?

Partially hydrogenated oils are used in some margarines to give it firmness and spreadability. Partially hydrogenated oils in certain margarines and shortenings prolong the shelf life of cookies, cakes and frying oil. It is commonly used for frying at many fast food restaurants and often used in bakeries to keep the baked goods fresh for longer. It is also used to give a creamy texture to non-dairy creamer.

So should I use butter instead of margarine?

While stick margarine is often high in *trans* fat, butter is high in saturated fat, which is also harmful to health if taken in excess. The best choice would be to find a soft, buttery spread that has no *trans* fat and is low in saturated fat, such as Smart Balance® or Promise®.

What about oils?

The healthiest oils are non-hydrogenated oils, such as olive, canola, sunflower and soybean oils.

What is the recommended daily limit on *trans* fat?

It is recommended to limit *trans* fat intake to less than 1 percent of total daily calories. So for an average person needing 2,000 calories per day, that would be no more than 2.2 grams/day. A donut made with partially hydrogenated oils would have 3.2 grams and a large order of fries would have 6.8 grams, so it is very easy to go over this recommended limit.

What is the current legislation regarding *trans* fat?

As of January 2006, the FDA requires *trans* fat to be listed on the nutrition label. Although changes in labeling are important, they aren't enough. For example, many fast

foods contain high levels of *trans* fat, yet there are no labeling regulations for fast food, and it can even be advertised as cholesterol-free and cooked in vegetable oil.

What is going on in Suffolk County legislation regarding *trans* fat?

As of February 6th, 2009 Suffolk County implemented a law banning the use of artificial *trans* fats in restaurants. The law will be phased in over the next 15 months. The law also requires chain restaurants to post the calorie counts of menu items.

For more information:

<http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=532>

http://www.eatright.org/ada/files/DIETARY_FATS.pdf

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/22/nyregion/long-island/22Rfats.html>