Trans Fat

What It Is

Trans fat is an unsaturated fat, but it is structurally different than unsaturated fat that occurs naturally in plant foods. Trans fat has detrimental health effects and is not essential in the diet.

There are two sources of trans fat:

- **Trans fat formed naturally** – this type of trans fat is produced in the gut of some grazing animals (such as cattle and sheep).
- **Trans fat formed artificially during food processing** – this type of trans fat is created during a process called “partial hydrogenation” in which hydrogen is added to liquid vegetable oil to make it more solid, and therefore more resistant to becoming spoiled or rancid. The process generally does not make the oil completely solid, resulting in “partially” hydrogenated oils.

Where It Is Found

**Trans fat formed naturally** is found in small amounts in some animal products, such as meats and dairy products. **Trans fat formed artificially during food processing** is found in partially hydrogenated oils used in a variety of foods, including:

- Coffee creamer
- Fast food
- Frozen pizza
- Grain-based desserts (such as cakes, cookies, and frozen pies)
- Ready-to-use frostings
- Refrigerated dough products (such as biscuits and cinnamon rolls)
- Savory snacks (such as crackers and microwave popcorn)
- Vegetable shortening and stick margarine

What It Does

**Partially hydrogenated oils** are used by food manufacturers to improve the texture, shelf life, and flavor stability of foods. Partially hydrogenated oils should not be confused with “fully hydrogenated oils,” which are solid fats that contain very low levels of trans fat.

Trans Fat

Trans Fat can increase the risk of developing cardiovascular disease.

Trans fat is a nutrient to get less of.

Update on Trans Fat

On June 16, 2015, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) took action that will significantly reduce the use of partially hydrogenated oils, the major source of artificial trans fats in the food supply. This action is expected to reduce cardiovascular disease and prevent thousands of fatal heart attacks each year in the U.S.

FDA is providing companies three years to either reformulate products without partially hydrogenated oils and/or petition FDA to permit specific uses. Food companies have already been working to remove partially hydrogenated oils from processed foods and FDA anticipates that many may eliminate them ahead of the three-year compliance date.

It’s important to note that trans fat will not be completely gone from foods because it occurs naturally in small amounts in meat and dairy products, and is present at very low levels in other edible oils.

http://www.fda.gov/nutritioneducation
Health Facts

- About half of the trans fat Americans consume is from partially hydrogenated oils.
- Trans fat increases the level of low-density lipoprotein (LDL or “bad”) cholesterol and decreases the level of high-density lipoprotein (HDL or “good”) cholesterol in the blood — which, in turn, can increase the risk of developing cardiovascular disease. Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death in both men and women in the U.S.
- The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends keeping the intake of trans fat as low as possible by limiting foods containing partially hydrogenated oils (a source of artificial trans fat). Eating foods with even small amounts of trans fat can add up to a significant intake over time.

Action Steps

For Reducing Trans Fat in Your Diet

Use the Nutrition Facts Label as your tool for reducing consumption of trans fat formed during food processing. The Nutrition Facts Label on food and beverage packages shows the amount in grams (g) of trans fat in one serving of the food.

Trans fat has no Percent Daily Value (%DV), so use the amount of grams (g) as a guide.

- Look for partially hydrogenated oils on the ingredient list on a food package.
  
  **NOTE:** The Nutrition Facts Label can state 0 g of trans fat if the food product contains less than 0.5 g 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 g of trans fat.

- Switch from stick margarine to soft margarine (liquid, spray, or tub).

- Cook and bake with liquid oils (such as canola and olive oil) instead of solid fats (such as butter, lard, and shortening).

- Try baking, broiling, grilling, or steaming. These cooking methods do not add extra fat.

- Limit grain-based desserts and savory snacks (such as cakes, cookies, crackers, and microwave popcorn).

- Choose lean cuts of meats and skinless poultry.

- Substitute fat-free (skim) or low-fat (1%) dairy products (such as cheese, milk, and yogurt) or fortified soy beverages for regular/full-fat (whole) dairy products.

- When eating out, ask which fats are being used to prepare your meal. You can also request to see nutrition information, which is available in many chain restaurants.