



...because health matters!

Nutrition Matters

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Trans Fat

Trans fat is making front page news. What is it? How is it formed? What foods contain trans fat? How does it affect our health?

What is a Trans Fat?

Trans fat (also known as Trans Fatty Acids) forms when liquid oil changes into a solid fat. This happens when a vegetable oil is made into margarine or shortening. The term used for this process is "hydrogenation".

Manufacturers use hydrogenated fats because:

- they are cheaper;
- they are more solid;
- they have a higher melting point allowing them to be used at high temperatures for frying; and
- they have a longer shelf life.

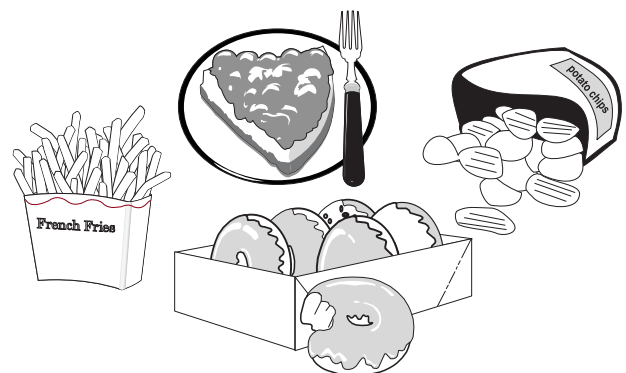
What Foods Contain Trans Fat?

Most of the trans fat in our diet comes from processed foods such as commercial baked goods, fried foods, margarine and shortening. This includes high fat foods such as cakes, cookies, corn chips, crackers, donuts, potato chips and french fries. Many fast food restaurants use hydrogenated fats. Food products containing shortening or partially-hydrogenated fats and oils should be consumed in moderation as they are a major source of trans fat.

How Does Trans Fat Affect Our Health?

Evidence shows that our bodies treat trans fat as if it were saturated fat. It increases the "bad" LDL cholesterol and decreases the "good" HDL cholesterol in the blood.

There is concern that the level of trans fat in many diets is too high. Many think that the current dietary levels of trans fat is partly associated with the following chronic diseases: atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries), cancer, diabetes and obesity. Researchers also think that trans fat may have a negative effect on our immune function, reproduction and lactation.



The Bottom Line...

Here's how to lower the trans fat in your diet:

1. Follow "Canada's Guidelines for Healthy Eating" which emphasize grain products and vegetables and fruit that are naturally low in fat. Choose low fat milk products as well as leaner meats, poultry and fish. Try to choose dried peas, beans and lentils more often.
2. Eat less fat. Consider all sources of fat in your diet and work on reducing the amount of fat eaten. By cutting your fat intake, you will automatically reduce the amount of saturated fat and trans fat in your diet. The less total fat in your diet, the less trans fat.
3. Limit the amount of fatty processed foods you eat. They are the major sources of hidden trans fat. This includes foods such as cookies, crackers, baked goods, potato chips, french fries and other deep fried foods.
4. Use canola or olive oil instead of butter, margarine or shortening, whenever possible. Many recipes produce equally good results when oil is substituted for margarine or shortening.
5. If using margarine, choose a soft tub margarine. Soft tub margarines tend to contain less trans fat than harder margarines or butter. There are some soft-tub margarines that are non-hydrogenated and have no trans fat. Whichever spread you choose, spread it thinly.
6. Learn to read the nutrition label. Nutrition labels list the amount of total, saturated and trans fat in a product.