

WHO recommends global phasing out of Trans fats

WHAT IS TRANS FAT?

Transfats occur when manufacturers add hydrogen to vegetable oil to increase the shelf life and flavour stability of foods. This process is called hydrogenation. Transfats can be found in vegetable shortenings some margarines, crackers, cookies, snack foods, and other foods made with or fried in partially hydrogenated oils. Unlike other fats, majority of transfat during the process of hydrogenation. However, a small amount of transfat is found naturally, primarily in some animal based foods.

WHO RECOMMENDATION ON TRANS FATS?

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has recommended that governments around the world phase out partially hydrogenated oils if transfat labelling alone doesn't spur significant reductions.

The recommendation was put forth by the [WHO](#) in a proposed action plan for its food standards rule making body, the [Codex Alimentarius Commission \(Codex\)](#) *Comments were requested on draft action plan for implementation of the global strategy on diet, physical activity and health.*

Transfats, which are mainly found in (partially) hydrogenated vegetable oil, common ingredients in thousands of food products, have been negatively linked to raising blood cholesterol levels and promoting heart disease.

Research shows that when too much 'bad' cholesterol circulates in the blood, it can slowly build up in the inner walls of the arteries that feed the heart and brain resulting in atherosclerosis.

The WHO initiative has met with approval from consumer groups. *"If implemented, the action plan would be an important step in combating the global epidemic of diet-related disease and obesity,"* said Bruce Silverglade, director of legal affairs for the US-based Center for Science in the Public Interest

RECOMMENDATION OF INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF GROCERY MANUFACTURERS ASSOCIATION?

Transfat is defined as only the trans fatty acids with non conjugated double bonds (fully hydrogenated oils and partially hydrogenated oils); conjugated linoleic acid (naturally occurring in meat and dairy products) would be excluded from the definition of trans fat. Fact that the identification of trans- fatty acid is based on the actual chemical structures of the fatty acids. ICGMA supports this definition because it would exclude fatty acids, conjugated bonds; fatty acids that are metabolized differently than those with non – conjugated bonds.

COMMENTS OF FDA

The Food and drug Administration has required that saturated fat and dietary cholesterol be listed on food labels since 1993.

Scientific evidence shows that consumption of saturated fat, transfat, and dietary cholesterol raises low-density lipoprotein (LDL), or “bad Cholesterol”, levels, which increases the risk of coronary heart diseases(CHD).

INDIAN SCENE

What is most shocking is that the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare’s own sub committee recommended the urgent setting of standards for Transfats. But as yet, nothing has happened. In 2004, the Union health ministry’s Oils and Fats sub-committee, under the Central committee for Food Standards, began discussion on a standard for Transfats. In January 2008, the sub- committee forwarded its recommendations to the central committee for setting the standards on trans fats. But the central committee is still awaiting more data and information instead of standards, in September 2008, the Union Health ministry issued a notification for labelling of transfats on oily food. Without a legal binding standard, this notification of labelling is meaningless. So today, oil companies get away by giving the composition on a range; Rath Vanaspathi, for instance, says its package has 8-33 percent transfats. This would mean that the product has 15 times higher transfats than the Danish standard. Another oil company says, it has transfats in the range of 15-55 percent. This makes a complete mockery of the science of food regulations. And clearly cannot be acceptable.