

Position Statement

TRANS FATTY ACIDS ('TRANS FAT') AND HEART DISEASE AND STROKE

FACTS

- Your diet can influence your risk for heart disease and stroke. Eating habits that will lower your risk include eating a high-fibre, lower-fat diet, eating lots of vegetables and fruit, and eating portions of food that are in line with your level of physical activity.
- A high consumption of trans fats leads to a threefold increase in risk of heart disease and is responsible for thousands of cardiac deaths every year in Canada.*
- Trans fats are at least five times more harmful, on a gram by gram basis than saturated fats.¹
- In 2006, the Trans Fat Task Force, which was co-chaired by the Heart and Stroke Foundation and Health Canada, recommended the introduction of regulations to limit trans fat in the Canadian food supply. Specifically, the report called for a limit on the total trans fat content of cooking oils and soft margarines at no more than 2% and in all other foods at no more than 5%.
- In response to the report, the federal government called on the food industry to voluntarily reduce trans fat levels and implemented a monitoring process over a two year period to evaluate progress.
- While progress has been made, 25% of food products recently tested by Health Canada still contain significant amounts of trans fats. Trans fats are present in over 50% of baked goods and foods often consumed by children.²
- Trans fat consumption in Canada in the mid 1990s was 8.4 g/day and in 2008 is estimated to be 3.4 g/day.² Despite this progress, trans fat levels still remain above what is recommended by the World Health Organization.
- Public opinion polling shows that 84% of Canadians are supportive of regulations to ban trans fats in restaurants and schools, and 73% think it is okay for government to take action against trans fat because they pose a health risk.³
- In 2009, the government of British Columbia implemented regulations to limit the amount of trans fat in fast food establishments and schools.
- Countries that have introduced trans fat regulations include Denmark, Switzerland, Argentina, and other jurisdictions.
- Lowering trans fat and saturated fat in your diet will help reduce your risk for heart disease and stroke.
- Simply lowering or eliminating trans fat in packaged food will not necessarily make the food we eat more nutritious. You should also be aware of the salt and sugar content, the overall number of calories and the types of fat (saturated, unsaturated and trans) in the foods you eat.

*Estimate based on Harvard School of Public Health data. The Harvard School of Public Health and the Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston estimated that at least 30,000 and as many as 100,000 cardiac deaths a year in the US could be prevented if people replaced trans fat with healthier oils. Applying these estimates to the Canadian population we get an estimate of as many as 30,000 cardiac deaths every decade in Canada or 3,000 deaths a year.



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RECOMMENDATIONS

The Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada recommends that:

Canadians

1. Consume a healthy balanced diet that includes:
 - a. Foods from the four food groups in Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide.
 - b. 20-35% of total calories from fat (about 45-75 grams/day for a woman and about 60-105 grams/day for a man).
 - c. More polyunsaturated fat, especially omega-3 fatty acids (fatty fish, flaxseed, canola oil, soybean oil, nuts, liquid egg products, etc.) and monounsaturated fat (olive oil, canola oil, avocados, nuts, etc.).
 - d. Lower amounts of trans fat and saturated fat
2. Prepare their meals at home and eat fresh food as often as possible, limit their consumption of processed foods, eat four to 10 servings of fruit and vegetables a day, eat lower-fat products, and include items from the four food groups.
3. Read the nutrition facts panel on food products to assist in reducing or eliminating trans fat consumption.

Government

1. Implement the recommendations in the Final Report of the Trans Fat Task Force (2006)[†], and in particular introduce regulations to limit the total trans fat content of cooking oils and soft margarines to no more than 2% and in all other foods to no more than 5%.
2. Provide accurate information about the nutritional value of foods and the health effects of lowering trans fat to the public, to help consumers make informed and healthy choices.

Industry

1. Replace trans fat in processed foods as soon as possible and where feasible with healthy alternatives such as monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats rather than with equal amounts of saturated fat.

[†] http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/nutrition/gras-trans-fats/tf-ge/index_e.html



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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Trans Fat Task Force was formed in early 2005, following passage of an opposition motion in the Canadian House of Commons in November 2004. The opposition motion called on Health Canada and the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada to co-chair a multi-stakeholder task force with a mandate to develop recommendations and strategies to effectively eliminate or reduce industrially processed trans fats in Canadian foods to the lowest level possible.

TRANSforming the Food Supply, the final report of the Trans Fat Task Force, was submitted to the Minister of Health in 2006. In June 2007, the government endorsed the trans fat levels recommended in the report, specifically calling for a limit of no more than 2% of the total trans fat content of cooking oils and soft margarines and no more than 5% of the total fat content in all other foods. The food industry was given a two year voluntary reduction period to significantly reduce trans fat in the food supply. In order to evaluate progress, the federal government introduced a monitoring process over the course of two years. The two year voluntary period expired in 2009 and the last round of monitoring in 2008 indicated that 25% of the food products tested by Health Canada still contain significant amounts of trans fat. Trans fat continues to be present in well over 50% of baked goods and in many foods often consumed by children. Moreover, trans fat levels in Canada remain higher than what is recommended by the World Health Organization.

In 2008 the government of British Columbia announced its intention to restrict trans fat in prepared foods in restaurants and schools by 2010. The regulations restricting trans fat in fast food service establishments came into effect on September 30, 2009, making BC the first province in Canada to regulate trans fat.

Unsaturated fat, Saturated fat and Trans fat

Unsaturated fat

Unsaturated fat can help lower low density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol ('bad' cholesterol) levels. There are two types: monounsaturated and polyunsaturated.

Monounsaturated fat is found mainly in olive and canola oils and some soft, non-hydrogenated margarines.

Polyunsaturated fats include omega-3 and omega-6 fats; essential fats that your body cannot produce.

- **Omega-3 fat** helps prevent blood from sticking and clotting and helps lower triglycerides. This fat is found in fatty fish such as salmon, mackerel, herring and sardines as well as in flax and some newer products such as omega-3 liquid eggs.
- **Omega-6 fat** helps lower LDL-cholesterol ('bad' cholesterol), but when eaten in large amounts is thought to lower high density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol ("good" cholesterol). This fat is liquid at room temperature and is found in foods that come from plants. Examples include safflower, sunflower and corn oils, some non-hydrogenated margarines and some nuts and seeds such as almonds, pecans, brazil nuts, sunflower seeds and sesame seeds.

Saturated fat

Saturated fat can raise LDL-cholesterol ('bad' cholesterol) levels. Saturated fat is solid at room temperature and generally comes from animal sources such as meat, poultry, and dairy foods. Plant sources include coconut oil, palm oil and palm kernel oil. You can reduce the amount of saturated fat you eat by choosing lean meats, removing the skin from chicken and using lower fat dairy products. In addition, any cooking method that allows fat to drain off (e.g., broiling, grilling, roasting on a rack) helps reduce the amount of saturated fat you eat.

Trans fat

Trans fat is created when an unsaturated fat is processed or hydrogenated. Like saturated fat, trans fat raises LDL-cholesterol ('bad' cholesterol) levels. Trans fat is found in partially hydrogenated margarines, as well as in many crackers, cookies and commercially baked products, usually listed as "partially hydrogenated" or "vegetable oil shortening" in the ingredients. Trans fats can also be found in deep fried foods from fast food outlets.

To help you identify trans fat and other ingredients in foods, read the Nutrition Facts table on food labels. These tables can help you identify and limit your intake of products high in trans fat.

For more information on heart healthy eating, visit heartandstroke.ca. To learn about our Health Check™ food information program, which will help you identify healthy food choices at the grocery store and other retailers, visit healthcheck.org.



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REFERENCES

1. Stender S, Dyerberg J. Influence of trans fatty acids on health. *Annals of Nutrition & Metabolism* 2004;48:61-6.
2. Ratnayake WM, L'Abbe MR, Farnworth S, Dumais L, Gagnon C, Lampi B et al. Trans Ffatty acids: current contents in Canadian foods and estimated intake levels for the Canadian population. *Journal of OAC International* 2009;92(5):1258-76.
3. Angus Reid Strategies. Canadians overwhelmingly support banning trans fats. Press Release, March 13, 2008. Available at docstoc.com/docs/31235877/Canadians-Overwhelmingly-Support-Banning-Trans-Fats.

The Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada recognizes that the life-long heart health of Canadians is affected by both individual and social factors. Individual factors include genetic make-up, personal health choices and actions, and social support. Social factors include the social, economic and environmental conditions in which Canadians live, work, learn and play. The Foundation encourages Canadians to make heart-healthy choices and encourages governments and the private sector to develop policies and programs that support healthy communities and reduce inequalities that negatively affect health and well-being.

The information contained in this position statement is current as of: SEPTEMBER 2011

