FOOD FACTS

From the U.S. Food and Drug Administration

Talking About *Trans* Fat

What You Need to Know

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Trans Fat at-a-Glance

There are two sources of *trans* fat, also known as *trans* fatty acids:

- ***Trans* fat formed naturally** – this type of *trans* fat is produced in the gut of some grazing animals. That's why small quantities of *trans* fat can be found in animal products like milk, milk products, and meat.
- ***Trans* fat formed during food processing** – this type of *trans* fat is created when hydrogen is added to vegetable oil (a process called **hydrogenation**) to make it more solid. **Partially hydrogenated oils** are used by food manufacturers to improve the texture, shelf life and flavor stability of foods. About half of the *trans* fat Americans consume is formed during food processing and partially hydrogenated oils are the main source of this type of *trans* fat in the U.S.

As a consumer, the most important thing to know about *trans* fat is that it **raises low-density lipoprotein (LDL or "bad") cholesterol**. An elevated LDL blood cholesterol level increases your risk of developing **heart disease**. Heart disease is the leading killer of both men and women in the U.S.

Fats in Your Diet

Limiting *trans* fats is one component of a healthful diet that also includes limiting saturated fat and dietary cholesterol.

Dietary fats are found in both plant and animal foods. Fat is a major source of energy for the body and aids in the absorption of vitamins A, D, E and K. Fat is also important for proper growth, development and maintenance of good health.

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans notes that adults should consume no more than approximately one third of their calories from fat to reduce their risk of developing chronic diseases (such as heart disease), while providing for adequate intake of essential nutrients.

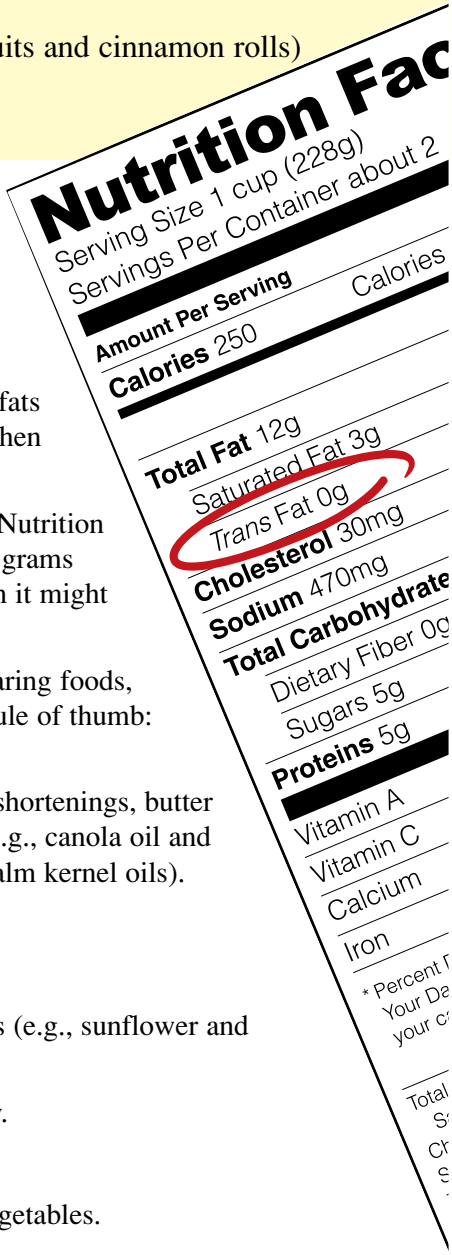
Infants and toddlers up to two years of age have the highest energy needs per unit of body weight of any age group. Fats are an important source of calories and nutrients for these youngsters.

As a food ingredient, fat provides flavor, consistency and stability – and helps you feel full.

Where's the *Trans* Fat?

Trans fat can be found in many of the same foods as saturated fat. These can include:

- Crackers, cookies, cakes, frozen pies and other baked goods
- Snack foods (such as microwave popcorn)
- Frozen pizza
- Fast food
- Vegetable shortenings and stick margarines
- Coffee creamer
- Refrigerated dough products (such as biscuits and cinnamon rolls)
- Ready-to-use frostings



Choose Your Fats Wisely

Use the Nutrition Facts Label as your tool for reducing *trans* fat, saturated fat and cholesterol in your diet – which may help decrease your risk of developing heart disease!

- Keep *trans* fat consumption as low as possible by limiting foods that contain *trans* fats formed during food processing. *Trans* fat has no percent Daily Value (%DV), so when you look at the Nutrition Facts Label, use the amount of grams (g) as your guide.
- Check the Ingredient List on the food package for partially hydrogenated oils. The Nutrition Facts Label can state 0 grams of *trans* fat if the food product contains less than 0.5 grams 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 grams of *trans* fat.
- Choose foods low in saturated fat and cholesterol for a healthful diet. When comparing foods, choose the food with the lower %DV of saturated fat and cholesterol. As a quick rule of thumb: 5% DV or less is low and 20% DV or more is high.
- Cook and bake with vegetable oils (liquid or spray) instead of solid fats, like solid shortenings, butter or lard. Choose oils that are higher in monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats (e.g., canola oil and olive oil), and avoid oils that are higher in saturated fats (e.g., coconut, palm and palm kernel oils).
- Switch from stick margarine to soft margarine (liquid, tub, or spray).
- Try baking, steaming, grilling or broiling instead of frying.
- Eat foods that contain healthier fats, such as nuts (e.g., walnuts and almonds), seeds (e.g., sunflower and pumpkin), olives and avocados.
- Choose low-fat or fat-free dairy products and lean cuts of meat and skinless poultry.
- Eat more seafood and choose it in place of some meat and poultry.
- Get plenty of foods that are naturally low in fat, such as whole grains, fruits and vegetables.
- When eating out, remember to ask which fats are being used in the preparation of the food you're ordering. You can also ask to see nutrition information available in many fast food or chain restaurants and choose a lower-fat option.

For more information, contact: The U.S. Food and Drug Administration Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition Food Information Line at 1-888-SAFEFOOD (toll free), 10 AM to 4 PM ET, Monday through Friday. Or visit the FDA Web site at **www.fda.gov**