

Trans Fat Facts: Where Are Trans Fats Now?

Trans fats, also called partially hydrogenated oil, were created by chemists to replace butter and other saturated fats back in the day when saturated fat was first linked to heart disease.

But, as nearly everyone knows by now, trans fatty acids have proven even worse for health than saturated fat. In addition to raising your LDL "bad" cholesterol levels, trans fats -- like saturated fats -- also decrease your HDL "good" cholesterol" levels at the same time. According to the American Heart Association, eating trans fats not only increase your risk of developing heart disease, but also stroke and type 2 diabetes.

In 2006 the FDA began requiring most food companies to include trans fat grams on the Nutrition Facts label, just below saturated fat.

Since this nutrition label change, the amount of trans fat in our food has declined by 50%, according to the Center for Science in the Public Interest, which first raised the trans fat alarm. Most food manufacturers are gradually phasing trans fats out of products, or at least reducing the amount of trans fat used in food production.

Still, it's far too easy to eat more than the recommended limit of trans fats each day: 2 grams in a 2,000-calorie diet.

Food labels can claim to be "trans-fat free" or have "0 trans fats" if they contain half a gram of trans fat or less per serving. Yet if you eat four servings of that food, you've reached your daily limit. Trans fats also occur naturally in very low levels in meat and dairy products, but the vast majority of trans fat in our diet comes from packaged food.

Where Are Trans Fats Today?

Today many food manufacturers have eliminated or hugely reduced the amount of trans fat in their products. You can buy cookies and soft-spread margarine with zero or little trans fat. In fact, for every product at the supermarket that contains trans fats, you can probably find a "0 trans fat" alternative if you read labels carefully.

Still, even today, trans fats are used by some food makers -- and certain products are more likely to contain trans fats. The Center for Science in the Public Interest in 2007 conducted a limited supermarket survey and found a day's worth of trans fat in various brands of:

- Pot pies
- Microwave popcorn
- Frozen pizzas
- Pastries
- Cookies
- Convenience foods

What should consumers do? Shop smart. Read labels and buy products with the smallest amount of trans fat *and* saturated fat. But switching from trans fats to butter won't do your heart any good.

Shopping for healthy fats is far easier in the grocery store -- where fat facts appear on labels -- than in fast-food restaurants. Here are some tips for avoiding trans fats in fast food.

Spotting Trans Fats in Fast Food

Some fast-food chains have successfully eliminated trans from their menus. In October 2008, Burger King and Chick-fil-A announced they were eliminating trans fats from every menu item. Other chains, such as McDonald's and KFC, have dropped trans fats from cooking oil and in many products, but not all.

Check the nutritional information for the chains you frequent the most. As the movement against trans fats sweeps the nation, fewer and fewer foods will contain it. But be sure you're not switching to a heavy load of saturated fat, known to contribute to heart disease. Nutrition and fat facts are almost always available on a fast-food chain's web site, in pamphlets at the restaurant, or on a poster displayed at the restaurant.

Here are specific types of fast foods to check out carefully:

- **Pastries, pie crust, and biscuits:** KFC's Chicken Pot Pie, for example, contains 14 grams of trans fat – seven times the recommended limit. And Arby's Apple or Cherry Turnover contains 6.5 and 6 grams of trans fat.
- **Breaded or fried chicken and seafood:** The Breaded Clams from Long John Silvers have 7 grams of trans per serving while a Crispy Chicken Club Salad contains 6.5 grams of trans fat. A piece of battered fish at Long John Silver's is worth 4.5 grams of trans fat.
- **Deep fried potatoes:** Many fast-food restaurants have started using a blend of monounsaturated and polyunsaturated cooking oils in which to fry potatoes and food. But some still use trans fats for cooking oil. Ask at the counter or -- better yet -- check the restaurant's nutrition information.
- **Desserts:** Even desserts that sound healthy may include trans fats. For example, the baked apple pie from McDonald's contains 5 grams of trans fat -- more than twice the recommended daily limit.
- **Breakfasts:** The Hearty or Denver Breakfast Bowls at Jack in the Box contain 7 grams of trans fat each. And the breakfast biscuits have 5 to 7 grams of trans fat, depending on the fillers. Even the French Toast Sticks (four pieces) add 5 grams of trans to your diet.

Don't Forget to Look for Saturated Fat

While you are looking at nutrition fact labels or fast-food nutrition information charts, you might notice that where there is trans fat, there is usually saturated fat too. Add them together and you've got the total of the "bad" fats in the meal.

So, keep a close eye on the grams of saturated fat in the food you buy. Saturated fat, like trans fats, is linked to heart disease. You don't help your health if you avoid trans fats, but instead choose foods loaded with saturated fat.

Dietary guidelines recommend we eat no more than 7% of our fat from saturated fat. That comes to 14 grams of saturated fat if you eat 1,800 calories a day, or 17 grams of fat if you eat 2,200 calories a day.

Don't Forget to Look for Saturated Fat continued...

It's especially easy to overdo saturated fat when you eat at fast-food restaurants. Consider:

- A Chicken Pot Pie at KFC contains 15 grams of saturated fat, plus 14 grams of trans fat, giving you a total of 29 grams of "bad" fat.
- A Sausage, Egg & Cheese Biscuit at Burger King contains 12 grams of saturated fat and 6 grams of trans fat, giving you 18 grams of "bad" fat.

So, while progress has been made in eliminating the trans fat from food, there is still more work to be done. Read nutrition labels carefully -- especially on pot pies, microwave popcorn, frozen pizzas, pastries, cookies, and convenience foods. Avoid ordering fast food that has 1 or more grams of trans fat. The health you protect is your own.

<http://www.webmd.com/food-recipes/nutrition-labels-9/trans-fats?page=3>