



The Care Group, P.C.

**Drop that Cake:
Trans Fats may be Killing You**

By Gerard Guillory, M.D.

Trans fats may be the worst thing you can include in your diet but, if you live in Colorado and other states that don't regulate these dangerous food additives, you probably aren't even aware that you are eating them.

Trans fats were engineered by 19th-century food scientists who wanted to increase the shelf life of processed foods by reducing rancidity. Small amounts of trans fats occur naturally in meat and dairy products, but most trans fats are created artificially by adding hydrogen to plant oils. It is this process that enables the cream-filled, sponge-cake treat that you lost under the car seat seven years ago to look and taste today much as it did the day it was manufactured.

Trans fats are made by adding hydrogen atoms to vegetable oils at strategic locations, rendering the fat more rigid and stable. When you ingest these, your body tries to incorporate the rigid fats into its cell walls, causing damage in the process. The damage occurs because trans fats aren't pliable like normal fats. Trying to metabolize them is like trying to put the proverbial square peg into the round hole.

The health implications are serious. Trans fats increase the risk of cardiovascular disease by increasing LDL (bad) cholesterol, lowering HDL (good) cholesterol and raising triglycerides. They increase the stickiness of certain cells in the blood, increasing the possibility of dangerous blood clots. Trans fats also increase inflammation, which accelerates many age-related disorders, including cancer, diabetes, Alzheimer's, and arthritis—to name a few.

Trans fats are arguably the worst food substance you can put in your body, and their introduction into the food supply parallels the rise in heart disease and diabetes over the past century.

As medical researchers have learned more about these dangers, some governments have responded decisively. Trans fats have been banned in Denmark. Fast-food chains in Australia recently agreed to stop using trans fats, averting a proposed government ban. The California state Legislature is considering a prohibition. The City of Philadelphia recently decided to enact one.

For many Americans, the issue came to light when New York City ordered local restaurants to stop using trans fats. The city since has created a useful pamphlet on the topic, which you can view by clicking on this link:

<http://home2.nyc.gov/html/doh/downloads/pdf/cardio/cardio-transfat-brochure.pdf>

Since 2006, the U.S. government has required that trans fats be listed on nutrition labels, but this applies to interstate commerce. Many U.S. restaurants and food chains have begun to voluntarily decrease or eliminate trans fats in menu items.

Nonetheless, trans fats remain hidden in many foods; for example, many of the deli and bakery items at your local supermarket are loaded with trans fats. If there is a label on the packaging, it may say that *partially hydrogenated oils* are contained in the product. What it won't say is that partially hydrogenated oils are trans fats.

I suspect that trans fats eventually will be banned altogether as evidence continues to mount regarding their adverse health effects. But don't wait for lawmakers to take action. Eliminate trans fats from your diet now. They offer no health benefits and they pose considerable potential for harm.

To protect yourself, you have to learn to read labels. When you see the words *partially hydrogenated vegetable oil* on a list of ingredients, don't buy the product.

I also would urge you to take a copy of this article to your supermarket and give it to a manager or clerk. Tell them: "My doctor has advised me to eliminate trans fats from my diet, which means I can't eat your deli items or baked goods. Please let me know when you have removed the partially hydrogenated oils—or trans fats—from these goods, so that I may start enjoying them again."

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