

Q

With all the media attention on trans fat, can you provide a perspective that addresses some frequently asked consumer questions?

A

Trans fat has been in the news, and your clients may have questions about it. Here's a brief overview and an online resource that provides additional information on this topic.

Trans fats are unsaturated fatty acids. They occur naturally in small amounts in many foods (e.g., beef, veal, lamb and foods containing milk fat, such as butter, whole milk, cream, cheese and ice cream) and are formed when vegetable oils are processed (partially hydrogenated) to make shortenings and oils for use in baking, frying or cooking. Partially hydrogenated vegetable oils function better in certain food applications: they give foods the desirable tastes and textures people expect, are more stable at high temperatures and help prevent oxidation. Partially hydrogenated oils may be found in some commercially fried foods, such as French fries, onion rings, fried chicken, fried fish; baked goods; savory snacks and some stick margarines. Developing alternative ingredients with the same taste, texture and freshness characteristics as fats that contain trans fatty acids, but with better nutrition, has been a challenge for the food industry. However, progress is being made in reducing the content of trans fatty acids in foods. In fact, Kraft has successfully completed a multi-year, voluntary trans fat reduction effort in the US while retaining great taste and ensuring that, in nearly every reformulated product, the combination of saturated fat plus trans fat did not increase compared to the original formulation.

In 1999, Allison et al. used data from the *Continuing Survey of Food Intake by Individuals* to estimate consumption of trans fat. The mean trans fatty acid intake for the US population was 2.6 percent of total energy intake. In contrast, saturated fat consumption was much higher; mean intake was 12.5 percent of total energy ingested.

Dietary guidance on intake of trans fat is evolving. One reason is that results of scientific studies are relatively recent, and some have had variable findings. In its 2002 report on dietary reference intakes for macronutrients, the National Academy of Sciences' Institute of Medicine (NAS/IOM) concluded that saturated fat, trans fat and dietary cholesterol all raise blood LDL cholesterol ("bad" cholesterol). According to NAS/IOM, some evidence also suggests that intake of trans fat lowers HDL cholesterol ("good" cholesterol).

The NAS/IOM recognized that trans fats are currently unavoidable in ordinary diets and that trying to avoid these fats could lead to changes in dietary patterns that might not be beneficial to health. Thus, its recommendation is to keep trans fat intake as low as possible while consuming a nutritionally adequate diet. *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* discusses trans fat in the context of keeping intake of saturated fat and trans fat low within a total fat intake that does not exceed 35% of calories. The most recent recommendations from the National Cholesterol Education Program say that trans fat intake should be kept low. Similar advice comes from the American Heart Association (AHA) with the guidance that saturated fat plus trans fat intake should not exceed 10% of calories.

The AHA recommends primarily using liquid oils and soft margarines (albeit sparingly) to achieve this low level of saturated fat plus trans fat intake.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is the final authority regarding information that should appear on food labels and how that information is best communicated to consumers. Kraft Foods agrees that trans fat should be listed on the Nutrition Facts panel, and its products list the amount of trans fat per serving on the Nutrition Facts panel in accordance with US food-labeling regulations.

Kraft Foods has always been a leader in providing consumers with food choices that fit their preferences. We're continually working on ways to enhance the nutritional profiles of our products, while delivering on consumers' expectations for quality and good taste. As a result, many favorite Kraft brands, including *Kraft Easy Mac*, *DiGiorno Thin Crispy Crust Pizza*, original *Oreo Chocolate Sandwich Cookies*, *Wheat Thins Crackers* and *Jell-O Pudding Snacks* will now be labeled as containing 0g trans fat per serving.

To find more information about trans fat, visit the International Food Information Council's website at www.ific.org. Look for Nutrition & Food Safety Information; click on Dietary Fats & Fat Replacers. Scroll down to Questions & Answers on the right side.

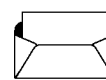
References:

Allison DB, Egan SK, Barraj LM, Caughman C, Infante M, Heimbach JT. Estimated intakes of *trans* fatty and other fatty acids in the US population. *J Am Diet Assoc.* 1999; 99:166-174.

Dietary Reference Intakes for Energy, Carbohydrate, Fiber, Fat, Fatty Acids, Cholesterol, Protein and Amino Acids. Washington, DC: The National Academy of Sciences, 2002. [www.iom.edu – Click on "Recent Reports," then scroll down to "Reports issued in 2002."]

AHA Dietary Guidelines Revision 2000: a statement for healthcare professionals from the Nutrition Committee of the American Heart Association. *Circulation.* 2000; 102:2296-2311.

Send Us Your Questions



Do you have a question that you would like to suggest for a future Practical Practice column? Send it to:

The Nutrition Update Group

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Please indicate if you would like your name to appear with your question. Published questions will be answered either by members of the Nutrition Update Advisory Committee, health professionals or Kraft Foods staff. We look forward to hearing from you.

Please note that all questions become the property of Nutrition Update. Nutrition Update reserves the right to answer questions that are best suited for the topic and regrets that it is unable to respond to every inquiry received.

