

Trans Fats – A silent killer wrapped under tasty treats

How often do you crave for lip-smacking pastries, cakes and desserts from your favourite bakeries? We all have one or two bakers that remain on top of our minds for any indulgence in such tasty treats. Moreover, with the growing influence of international culture on our younger generation, most occasions in today's times, especially birthdays, weddings and anniversaries, cannot be celebrated without ordering big-sized cakes, pastries and other confectionery items. This is complemented with highly processed foods such as crisps, pastries, biscuits, sweetened and fizzy beverages, commercially fried foods and desserts that we all enjoy.

But are these tasty treats full of sugar, spice and everything nice? Let us see. While we all love these delicacies, we are unaware of the high amounts of fat present in them, especially trans fats. Trans fats are used as ingredients in such foods. Trans fat content also increases in food if the same oil is used repeatedly for frying.

Trans fats are bad fats, which should not be consumed as a part of our diet. Why are trans-fats so bad? They are the worst type of fats because they raise the bad cholesterol (VLDL-c and LDL-c) and lower the

good cholesterol (HDL-c) in our body. Trans fats have been linked to overweight/obesity, high blood pressure, diabetes, heart diseases and some types of cancers. They are present in large quantities in partially hydrogenated vegetable fats (Vanaspatti, Margarine, bakery shortenings). In prepared foods, trans fats are found in:

- **Bakery products:** Biscuit, fan, rusk, cake etc.
- **Fried foods:** Bhatura, poori, pakora, bhujjiya, fried savoury mixtures (namkeens) etc.
- **Re-heated oils:** Small amounts of trans fats are also formed when the same cooking oil is used for repeated frying; not only at commercial outlets but even at household levels.

How can trans fats be eliminated from our diet? What can we do if the food available has so much trans fat present in it? Rest assured, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), the country's apex food regulatory body, has taken several steps in that direction.

On the regulatory side:

1. Food Safety and Standards (Food Products Standards and Food Additives) Regulations, 2011 prescribes that trans fats shall not be more than 5 per cent for vanaspatti, bakery shortenings, bakery and industrial margarine and interesterified vegetable fats/oils.

“Now you see there are three aspects to reducing trans fats consumption— one is to provide information to the public unless they know what they are consuming they can't make any informed choices. The second is the regulatory aspect and the third of course is to engage with all these stakeholders and to ensure that trans fat free or low trans fat products become available to people because unless they have the choices they can't really reduce their consumption of trans fats. So, as far as information is concerned we already have rules in our country that every packet of food has to display the level of trans fats. It is transparently displayed now-a-days but the regulation is the critical aspect before we make progress. On the regulatory front, right now we have a stipulation that no oils will contain more than 5 per cent trans fat that is the existing position. In addition to this, we have a trans fat free logo, which is voluntarily given to products, which have very low trans fat. This is the regulatory aspect, but regulations alone don't really win the war. Ultimately we have to engage with all the stakeholders. So, when we say information is mandatory and the regulation says that trans fat free product or low trans fat products have to be made available, the question is, how do they actually become available? There the crux of the matter lies, so in the next phase, as soon as we have this regulation, we will go for very intense engagement with all these stakeholders.”



- Arun Singhal, CEO, FSSAI

Tips for consumers to eliminate trans fats from the diet

For cooking trans fats free food

- Avoid using "vanaspati" for any kind of cooking.
- When deep-frying the foods (poori/pakora etc.), do not heat the oil for a very long time before and during cooking. Prefer to not leave the food in the oil for a very long time.
- Do not reheat the oil or re-use the same oil for frying. The oil that has once been used for frying can be used for the preparation of vegetables, curries, dals etc.
- Use a smaller vessel (kadhai, etc.) at home for deep-frying. This will allow you to do frying using a lesser amount of oil/fat.
- Limit the consumption of baked/processed foods like biscuit/fan, cake, chips, fried savoury mixtures (namkeens, etc.).

To avoid trans fats foods when shopping

- Check the Nutrition Facts Panel (NFP) on packaged food items for trans fats content and search for some healthier substitute.
- Sometimes the NFP on the food product does not mention the word trans fatty acid/trans fats, in such cases always check the ingredient list on the packaged food for the words like "margarine", "shortening" or "partially hydrogenated vegetable oil". These terms are usually used for trans fats and such food products should be avoided or choose a healthier alternative.

To avoid trans fats foods when eating outside

It might be easy to control what you eat when at home, but when eating at a restaurant try controlling the trans fats intake by doing the following:

- Ask the owner/server regarding the type of fat/oil being used for preparing the food.
- Avoid foods that are prepared/ fried in vanaspati, shortening or margarine.
- Avoid consuming fried foods like fried aloo chaat, french fries, samosa, bhatura etc. prepared in vanaspati. They are also high in fat.
- Reduce baked/processed foods like cookies, chips, cakes, puffs and patties.

Tips & Warnings: Small amounts of trans fats occur naturally in meat and dairy products, so choose lean cuts of meat and low fat dairy products.

“The target set for minimum to no use of trans fats by the Food & Beverage industry

can only be met with the cooperation and initiative of Food Business Operators. The reasons for continued use of trans fats over the healthier alternatives is largely due to the cost benefit - which can be eliminated if the better fats are paid for by sharing the cost between both producers and consumers, as well as an enlightened and demanding consumer increasingly facing the health and immunity challenges of the current world scenario.”



- Chef Sudhir Sibal,
Editor, Cuisine Digest
magazine for Chefs, New Delhi

“A comprehensive approach would be to eat healthier fats/ oils instead of hydrogenated oils,

promote the substitutes of industrially produced trans fats, prohibit the production/ supply of unhealthy ingredients/ processed food, create awareness among producers & suppliers on the negative implications of trans fats, educate the public to carefully read the nutritional facts and to cut down the fried food/ snack food intake.”



- Nikhil Mittal,
Nik Bakers, Chandigarh

2. The Food Safety and Standards (Packaging and labelling) Regulations, 2011 require that “every package of edible oils, interesterified vegetable fat, both hydrogenated or partially hydrogenated oils, edible fats, margarine and fat spreads (mixed fat spread and vegetable fat spread) and package of food in which fats, oils and fat emulsions are used as an ingredient, shall declare the quantity of trans fat content and saturated fat content on the label.” A health claim of ‘trans fat free’ may be made in cases where the trans fats is less than 0.2 g per 100g or 100ml of food.

On November 30, 2018, FSSAI launched a mass media

“Bakery products are often made from vegetable shortening and margarine, which were traditionally high in trans fats. Though, a good number bakers have already started reducing the trans fat content in bakery products since July 2018 after signing pledge for FREEDOM FROM TRANS FAT-INDIA@75. I am sure that bakers around the country should responsibly ensure that they bring down trans fat content to 2 per cent by 2020 by reformulation existing products, new product developments and substitution with alternates fats. They should proudly display TRANS FAT FREE Logo in packaging and bakeries. Let’s consumer recognize and appreciate how responsible are bakers in India”.



- Raj Kapoor,
 Founder and Managing Director, Assocom
 Institute of Bakery
 Technology & Management, Noida

“Fats and oils play a major role in taste perception and are important in food art, and scientific applications, such as food safety, preservation, freshness and presentation, etc. From a nutritional point of view, dietary fats are indispensable for our growth and development. While cooking, one should choose the right oil or cooking fat to make that big difference. Different fats and oils have their own smoking point. When heated beyond the smoke point, they release harmful free radicals. While cooking at medium to medium-high temperatures, ghee or clarified butter obtained from churning curd is a great option! This divine ingredient finds its roots in Indian cuisine. Let’s make the right choice”.



- Chef Manjit Singh Gill,
 Founder President, Indian Federation
 of Culinary Associations, Gurugram



campaign “Heart Attack Rewind”- a 30-second Public Service Announcement (PSA) with the aim to create public awareness about the harmful effects of trans fat by, (a) reducing acceptability of industrially produced (IP) trans fat in foods, (b) building public support for government action to eliminate IP trans fat and (c) leading consumers to the FSSAI website to seek more

information about trans fat.

Apart from this, on July 10, 2018, edible oil associations, bakery associations, individual bakeries and association of chefs had voluntarily committed to eliminate/reduce industrial trans fats from their products by signing pledges, as part of the ‘Eat Right India’ movement’. This included the edible oil industry (Indian Vanaspati Producers’ Association, The Solvent Extractors’ Association of India, The Vanaspati Manufacturers’ Association of India), bakeries (Indian Bakers Federation, Society of Indian Bakers, Assocom Institute of Bakery Technology & Management, Wheat Products Promotion Society and Federation of Biscuits Manufacturers of India).

Further, in October, 2019, ten bakeries were felicitated by Dr Harsh Vardhan, Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare at the 8th International Chefs Conference, organized by Indian Federation of Culinary Associations (IFCA) in New Delhi for adopting methods/ techniques to gradually eliminate trans fats from their food products or who commit to do so in near future. FSSAI intends to completely eliminate industrially produced trans fats from the food supply chain by 2022, a year ahead of the global target by the World Health Organization i.e. by 2023. **NS**

FSSAI team