**FACTS**

Taking the *Trans* Fat Out

Banning *Trans* Fats in Schools, Workplaces, and Restaurants

**OVERVIEW**

Until the previous decade, few Americans had ever heard of *trans* fat – found mostly in foods made with partially hydrogenated vegetable oil, like cookies, cakes, chips or fried foods. It wasn’t until January 2006 that *trans* fats were listed on packaged food labels, but they are still not found on fast food menu boards or restaurant menus. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recently determined that industrially-produced *trans* fats are unsafe and have taken steps toward barring food manufacturers from using them. There are many consumers who still do not know the increased health risks associated with *trans* fats, which include coronary heart disease (CHD) and diabetes.

Researchers have made a definitive link between industrially-produced *trans* fats and cardiovascular disease (CVD).

- One study showed that women with the highest levels of *trans* fats in their blood were associated with a three times higher risk of having CHD than those women with the lowest levels.
- *Trans* fats raise the levels of low-density lipoproteins ("bad cholesterol") that increase the likelihood of death from cardiovascular disease.
- *Trans* fats can cause inflammation and atherosclerotic lesions and interfere with the metabolism of other important, healthy fats.
- *Trans* fats may impair muscle insulin sensitivity, a factor associated with diabetes.

Eliminate industrially-produced *trans* fats from the food supply through public policy approaches is an important strategy for improving cardiovascular health. Policies include robust nutrition standards in schools, menu labeling in restaurants, *trans* fat bans in restaurants, robust standards for foods marketed and advertised to children, and strong procurement policies for foods purchased in government feeding programs and workplaces.

**TRANS FAT BASICS**

*Trans* fats arise during the chemical process known as partial hydrogenation of oils. It makes liquid cooking oils into stable semi-solids, such as vegetable shortening, and helps increase shelf life. Partially hydrogenated oils give foods like baked goods and french fries a desired feel and texture. A small amount of *trans* fats, along with saturated fat, occurs naturally in some animal foods, such as milk and beef.

Ironically, partially hydrogenated oils were once touted as healthy, cheap replacements for animal fats and tropical oils high in saturated fats, such as butter, lard, and palm oil.

Both saturated and *trans* fats are bad for heart health and should be replaced with mono- or polyunsaturated fat in order to reduce CVD risk. Recent studies show that healthy oils may be important for heart disease prevention. However, it is difficult to avoid “bad fats” altogether. The American Heart Association recommends that saturated fat be fewer than 7% of total calories and *trans* fat fewer than 1% of total calories.

**WHERE WE ARE NOW**

Since the FDA mandated *trans* fat labelling on packaged foods in 2006 and consumers began demanding foods without *trans* fats, industry has moved rapidly to find alternative oils and take them out of the food supply. Even government feeding programs have fewer *trans* fats. For example, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has reduced the amount of the *trans* fats from commodity foods offered in school meal programs, eliminated the fats from frozen potato products, and disallow shortening and butter as an ordering option. From their commodity list of 180 food items, only a few items still contain small amounts of *trans* fats and those are naturally-occurring. Use of *trans* fats in fast-food restaurants has essentially been eliminated. More than 50% of *trans* fats have been removed from the food supply. However, we are concerned that oils high in saturated fat, such as palm oil, are replacing partially hydrogenated oils in many manufactured food products to avoid *trans* fats being listed on the label. A recent study showed that consumption of palm oil leads to higher risk of heart disease.

Many states and localities have passed *trans* fat bans. Tiburon, CA became the first city in the U.S. where all restaurants voluntarily cooked with trans-fat free oils. A full statewide ban on their use in...
REAL WORLD CONCERNS
The American Heart Association supports regulatory and legislative efforts at all levels of government to reduce trans fat in the food we eat.

To assure that there is replacement with healthy options and not oils high in trans fat, we support a phased-in approach with regulatory safeguards that provide policy-makers flexibility in implementation and strong programmatic efforts to assist industry in the transition.

SUPPLY AND DEMAND
Trait-enhanced oils, such as low-linolenic soybean oil, and high-oleic canola and sunflower oils, are some of the best available trans fat alternatives. Industry is making significant progress in producing the replacement oils. About half of the replacement supply is available to replace trans fat from partially hydrogenated vegetable oils, and many healthy oils remain in development. This situation is complicated by incentives to plant crops for biofuels, such as corn for ethanol. Acreage that could be unused for trait-enhanced oil seeds may now be put to such purposes, particularly if farmers can make a much higher profit by growing commodity soybean and corn for alternative fuels.

The implications are clear. Even as demand rises, supply could decline, resulting in higher prices for healthy oils. Without an adequate and affordable supply of healthy oils, restaurants and food manufacturers may be forced to go back to using oils rich in trans fats. Unfortunately, any health benefits gained from removing trans fat will be significantly undermined if this trend were to occur. Therefore, we support efforts to remove industrially-produced trans fats and to provide an adequate and affordable supply of alternative healthy oils, despite the reality that they may cost more than unhealthy alternatives.

THE ASSOCIATION ADVOCATES
The American Heart Association will continue to monitor removal of industrially-produced trans fats from the food supply and assure that healthy replacement oils are used. We will:

- Continue to support the FDAs endeavor to ban industrially-produced trans fats and push for legislation and regulation that removes industrially-produced trans fats from food preparation in restaurants and schools and requires that all foods brought in be zero grams of industrial trans fat as labeled.
- Address labeling issues to assure that there is accurate information provided to consumers about the actual amounts of trans fats in food products.
- Support robust nutrition standards in schools, for foods marketed and advertised to children, and procurement standards for foods purchased by employers and government feeding programs.