

Trans Fats and the Food Label

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Background

Coronary heart disease (CHD) is a leading cause of death in the United States, with cholesterol being a major factor. Research has shown that high cholesterol can be the result of eating a diet with too much saturated fat and cholesterol. The latest research shows that another fat, trans fat (also called trans fatty acids), also raises low-density lipoprotein (LDL) or “bad” cholesterol levels.

Consumers can make heart-healthy diet choices if they know how much “bad” fat is in foods. The Food Labels have listed the total fats, saturated fats, and cholesterol in processed foods since 1993. At that time there was not enough evidence to link trans fat to heart disease. Now, using new research findings, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is requiring manufacturers of foods and some dietary supplements to list trans fats on the Food Labels by 2006. Trans fats will be listed under Nutrition Facts on a separate line immediately under “saturated fats.” Only foods and supplements that contain 0.5g or more of trans fat per serving will be required to list them on the label. This new label requirement will help consumers make more informed choices for a heart-healthy diet.

What Are Trans Fats?

Trans fats are formed during the process of converting liquid oils into solid fats such as shortening and stick margarine. This process is called hydrogenation, and it also increases the shelf life and flavor stability of these fats. There is a small amount of trans fat that occurs naturally in some animal-based products such as butter, milk products, cheese, beef, and lamb. Trans fats are not found in fruits, vegetables, or whole grains.

What Foods Are Likely to Contain Trans Fats?

Many foods have trans fats:

- Vegetable shortenings

- Some margarines
- Crackers
- Cookies
- Snack foods, including microwave “battered” popcorn
- Items made with or fried in partially hydrogenated oil, including some French fries, potato chips, salad dressings, and cakes

The biggest sources of trans fat for Americans are commercial products such as cakes, cookies, crackers, pies, and breads, followed by animal products and margarine.

How much Trans Fat Is Recommended?

Researchers agree that it is important to keep the intake of trans fat to a minimum. In fact, the American Heart Association recommends that consumers limit the total amount of trans fat and saturated fat combined to less than 10 percent of total calories everyday. Nevertheless, as yet there is no official government recommendation, so, just like for sugar and protein, there will be no “% Daily Value*” (DV) shown in the Nutrition Facts panel in the right hand column. Just remember, the less trans fat, the better.

How Can You Reduce Your Intake of Trans Fats?

- Limit your consumption of margarine and processed foods. These items, like those mentioned earlier, are more likely to have trans fats. Replace margarine with olive or peanut oil, which are high in mono-unsaturated fat. Substitute whole grains, fruits, and vegetables for processed foods; they provide many nutrients and health benefits without trans fat. Compare the different types of popcorn (see Labels # 1 - 3).
- Read the Food Label to compare brands and options. Buy items that have either lower levels of trans fats or no trans fats at all.

How Can the Food Label Help You Find Trans Fats?

- **On current labels:** Look for the words hydrogenated or partially hydrogenated oil in the “Ingredients” list, usually found near the Nutrition Facts panel. If one of these items is listed (as in Label #2), the item contains trans fats. Limit these foods as much as possible.
- **Once the new labels become available:** Read the Nutrition Facts panel. Trans fat will be found under “Total Fat” (see Label #3). Remember to compare the amounts of saturated fat, trans fat, and cholesterol in different products. Choose foods that are low in all of these, since they all can contribute to high LDL levels and heart disease.

The Virginia Cooperative Extension Web site at www.ext.vt.edu and your local Food, Nutrition, and Health Extension

agent have more information on related topics and can access other publications, such as:

Use the New Food Label to Choose a Diet Low in Fat, Saturated Fat and Cholesterol, Virginia Cooperative Extension publication 348-077

Know Your Cholesterol Number, Virginia Cooperative Extension publication 348-018

Heart Healthy Eating - Cholesterol, Fat, Fiber, & Sodium, Virginia Cooperative Extension publication 348-898

Reference

U.S. Food and Drug Administration, www.cfsan.fda.gov

Label #1: Air-popped Popcorn without Trans Fat (as it appears now)

INGREDIENTS: POPCORN

Note: Popcorn naturally contains mono- and poly-unsaturated fats, considered “healthy” fats.

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size 4 cups (32g) Servings Per Container 1	
Amount Per Serving	
Calories 120	Calories from Fat 10
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 1.5g	2%
Saturated Fat 0g	0%
Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 0mg	0%
Total Carbohydrate 25g	8%
Dietary Fiber 5g	19%
Sugars 0g	
Protein 4g	
Vitamin A 2%	Vitamin C 0%
Calcium 0%	Iron 4%
*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs: Calories: 2,000 2,500	
Total Fat	Less than 65g 80g
Saturated Fat	Less than 20g 25g
Cholesterol	Less than 300mg 300mg
Sodium	Less than 2,400mg 2,400mg
Total Carbohydrate	300g 375g
Dietary Fiber	25g 30g
Calories per gram: Fat 9 • Carbohydrate 4 • Protein 4	

Label #2: Microwave “Butter” Popcorn with Trans Fat (as it appears now)

INGREDIENTS: POPCORN, PARTIALLY HYDROGENATED SOYBEAN OIL, SALT, BUTTER (CREAM, MILK, SALT), NATURAL AND ARTIFICIAL FLAVOR, COLOR ADDED. FRESHNESS PRESERVED BY PROPYL GALLATE.

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size 4 cups (40g) Servings Per Container 1	
Amount Per Serving	
Calories 210	Calories from Fat 140
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 16g	25%
Saturated Fat 2g	10%
Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 440mg	18%
Total Carbohydrate 20g	7%
Dietary Fiber 4g	16%
Sugars 0g	
Protein 3g	
Vitamin A 60%	Vitamin C 0%
Calcium 0%	Iron 6%
*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs: Calories: 2,000 2,500	
Total Fat	Less than 65g 80g
Saturated Fat	Less than 20g 25g
Cholesterol	Less than 300mg 300mg
Sodium	Less than 2,400mg 2,400mg
Total Carbohydrate	300g 375g
Dietary Fiber	25g 30g
Calories per gram: Fat 9 • Carbohydrate 4 • Protein 4	

Label #3: Microwave “Butter” Popcorn with Trans Fat (as it will appear in the new label)

INGREDIENTS: POPCORN, PARTIALLY HYDROGENATED SOYBEAN OIL, SALT, BUTTER (CREAM, MILK, SALT), NATURAL AND ARTIFICIAL FLAVOR, COLOR ADDED. FRESHNESS PRESERVED BY PROPYL GALLATE.

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size 4 cups (40g) Servings Per Container 1	
Amount Per Serving	
Calories 210	Calories from Fat 140
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 16g	25%
Saturated Fat 2g	10%
Trans Fat 3g	
Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 440mg	18%
Total Carbohydrate 20g	7%
Dietary Fiber 4g	16%
Sugars 0g	
Protein 3g	
Vitamin A 60%	Vitamin C 0%
Calcium 0%	Iron 6%
*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs: Calories: 2,000 2,500	
Total Fat	Less than 65g 80g
Saturated Fat	Less than 20g 25g
Cholesterol	Less than 300mg 300mg
Sodium	Less than 2,400mg 2,400mg
Total Carbohydrate	300g 375g
Dietary Fiber	25g 30g
Calories per gram: Fat 9 • Carbohydrate 4 • Protein 4	