

# The trans fat controversy



The Trans Fat Controversy Fiona B. Stephan Felician College July 9, 2010

NU408 Abstract Trans fats are a cheap alternative to butter and other less harmful fats.

Trans fats have been used in restaurants and fast food establishments for years with detrimental effects on our health. Trans fats contribute to cardiovascular disease, high cholesterol, obesity and strokes. These fats are now banned in New York City and many other regions because they are so harmful.

Some have concern that the government should not have a voice in what we put in our bodies, and don't support the ban. Restaurants felt the switch to a safer fat would be costly. Our health is worth the cost and science has proven the ill effects of using trans fats over a lifetime. The Trans Fat Controversy Trans fat, a common ingredient, used in restaurants and fast foods establishments, has been the subject of controversy that has lead cities to ban the substance. New York City was the first city to legislate this ban, and many cities are following suit.

Denmark is the only country to enact such a ban. New York City initiated this ban in December 2006, after the FDA began requiring labeling of trans fat in supermarket foods (Rosenberg, 12/2006, p. 1). The bans were enacted after studies proved trans fat adversely affects cholesterol levels, increases an individual's chance of suffering a heart attack, and or stroke. Most individuals are in support of this ban, but there are others in our community who feel that it violates our right of choice. Some individuals feel that it violates our basic rights as Americans. Are we a free society As adults, do we

have the right to decide what foods we should eat There are four kinds of fats: monounsaturated, polyunsaturated, saturated fats, and trans fats.

Mono-unsaturated fat and poly-unsaturated fat are the, ??? good??? fats. Trans fat, which means trans fatty acids, is the worse kind, far worse than saturated fat, which is also unhealthy. Partial hydrogenation is an industrial process used to make perfectly good oil, such as soybean oil, palm oil and coconut oil into bad oil(NPR, 07/26/09). Food chemists found this alternative while working on ways to process food cheaper. This process makes oil more solid, which also provides a longer shelf life, and also makes the food taste better.

It also gives the food a buttery taste and texture. This process of using trans fats also makes frying oil last longer, which keeps the cost down, for restaurants that fry their food (NPR, 07/26/09). Do we want a longer shelf life for our foods, and a shorter shelf life for us Trans fat causes a lowering of HDL, which is your good cholesterol and a significant rise in your LDL, which is your bad cholesterol. LDL makes your arteries rigid, clogs your arteries and causes insulin to be regulated poorly.

Consumption of trans fat acids has been linked with increased markers of inflammation (Bauer, November-December 2009, p. 347). The inflammation is within the walls of the blood vessels which can lead to atherosclerosis. Several large studies have confirmed the relationship between the consumption of trans fat and the development of coronary artery disease (Bauer, November-December 2009, p. 347). Modifying diets and decreasing the intake of trans fat needs to be started early in life to preserve our

cardiovascular function. The FDA does not recommend eliminating trans fat from the diet all together that could result in an inadequate intake of other important nutrients, in people who eat a lot of commercially prepared foods. Listing of trans fat is not required on labels if the total fat content is less than 0.

5 gram (??? The Trouble with Trans Fat,??? 2004, p. 2). Restaurants are the new family dinner table. The restaurant industry accounts for 47.

5% of every food dollar spent, up from 25% in 1955 (Brownell, 10/18/2006). In any given day 40% of adults are eating out, many are children (Brownell, 10/18/2006). In 2005, 2/3 of New York City restaurants were still using trans fats. NYC health commissioner, Dr.

Thomas Frieden asked them to change voluntarily, and use an alternative (Brownell, 10/18/2006). After a robust year long campaign, little had changed (Brownell, 10/18/2006). The reason was cost; the smaller restaurants were the most reluctant. The larger chains started looking for alternatives that did not change the taste. Burger King had tested alternative oils, but met with consumer taste resistance (Rosenberg, 12/2006, p.

2). Other restaurant chains including KFC have been more aggressive.

Chains that have eliminated or significantly cut trans fat include Wendy's<sup>TM</sup>, Panera Bread Co., Ruby Tuesday, California Pizza Kitchen, and Legal Seafood (Rosenberg, 12/2006, p. 2). Many of these chains had stores in New York City so this had to be taken seriously, no matter what the cost.

Restaurants were given until July 2007 to switch to oils, margarines and shortening with less than 0.

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5 grams of trans fat per serving. This plan affected 24, 000 establishments ranging from corner delis, to the big chains. No one expected this to happen overnight, or without resistance. With every new law there has to be consequences, in NYC the punishment was fines that ranged from two hundred dollars, to a maximum of two thousand dollars (ORiordan, 7/20/2009).

In Denmark the fines are harsher, penalties include fines, and up to two years in prison (McElroy, 10/24/2006) Despite the risks associated with trans fats, some people continue to pose the question: What about our right to choose As consumers in a free society shouldn't we be able to decide which kinds of foods we want to eat There have been comparisons made between tobacco smoking bans, and trans fat. ??? Some people feel that it is an unconscionable infringement upon our personal liberties??? (Carden, 3/04/10). Is the government out of control with its bans ??? Where does it stop Does it stop with smoking, foods, risky sexual behavior (Carden, 3/04/10). Many feel that they are losing their ability to maintain control, on what goes into their bodies. These groups and individuals feel that it is not the governments business, to tell the food establishments and owners how to cook the food. That food bans are an overstepping of federal, state and local governments. With every change there will be opposition, this change was for the good, and it is imperative that the government steps in, to make the rules. The FDA has scientists that examine all the pros and cons, and need to set up guidelines.

These guidelines need to be on a federal level, due to the manufacturing of food that is shipped from state to state. Without rules, there would be chaos,  
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and with the government backing the ban there will be a formal set of guidelines. Opponents of trans fat are quick to look past the claims about the substance's harmful effects, asserting that the issue boils down to consumer freedom. In my opinion the general public is unaware or does not want to be,??? bothered??? with having to think about how a food item was cooked, or what kind of fat was incorporated into the product. The reason that we have become a fast food and restaurant society is because we don't have time to prepare a ??? healthy??? dinner at home. Generally, we are all on the go, from work, to the daycare, to class and then homework.

The majority of households today are working harder, and doing more. If the food was healthy at a fast food chain, then it would behoove me not feel good, feeding it to my child. Also, children are going to malls, hanging out with friends and are purchasing cheap food, at fast food establishments. If this food has a minimal amount of trans fat by law, then the youth will be a healthier adult. Teens do not read the labels, or think long and hard about healthy choices.

It is a here and now, feel good society and having laws that establish healthier food is beneficial. I think sacrificing the personal freedom of having trans fat in my food, outweighs the consequences. Heart disease in New York City is the leading cause of death. In 2004, 23, 000 NYC residents died from heart disease, one third before the age of 75 (NYC Board of Health, 12/5/2006). Any food made with trans fat, can be made with healthier fats, the period of adjustment in taste is worth the health heart advantage.

There are economic implications of switching to a non-trans fat, a Chicago restaurant owner; Ina Pinkey eliminated trans fat a few years ago, to make the food healthier for her patrons. She switched to canola oil, the taste, and fry life are virtually the same, but the Canola is about 30% more expensive. She feels that if the food is healthier, then patrons will eat more and come back sooner (??? Ditching Trans Fat: The Benefits Exceed the Cost,??? 02/14/2007). The Girl Scouts of the USA have addressed trans fats in their cookies; they began listing the amount of trans fat one full year before the FDA requirement went into effect (??? Girl Scout Cookies FAQ,??? 2010).

The cost of the cookies did increase but it is a healthier cookie, they still make a profit so the change was proactive. Wendy??™s reported in 2008 that they have completed their switch to no trans fats in Aug 2007. They are using a soy-corn oil blend, with virtually no trans fats. The switch was cost-neutral, and they haven??™t had any complaints (Shock, 04/01/2008). After New York City approved a ban on trans fats in restaurants, and school cafeterias in early December 2006, legislators in California, Connecticut, Florida and Massachusetts followed suit with proposals for full, or partial statewide bans. The proponents grew stronger in January with additional calls for prohibiting trans fats, also known as partially hydrogenated oils, by state legislators in Maryland, Mississippi, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, Texas and Virginia. The proposals are modeled after the new rules imposed by the New York City Board of Health that ban the use of artery-clogging, cholesterol-raising oils that? typically are used to prepare fast foods. By forcing some of the world??™s largest food chains and restaurants to use healthier alternatives in their food preparation, New York

City has paved the way for what I hope, will be a national movement, to improve the health quality of the food we eat in restaurants.

??? A February survey by Technomic, a food industry consulting firm, found that 82 % of New York City consumers reported that calorie postings affected what they chose to order. Forty percent of the 755 surveyed said they had a great impact, while 42 percent listed ??? somewhat??? of an impact.? Eighty-nine percent said they were in favor of the law??? (Manion-Fischer, 03/12/10). It appears that most people want to remain healthy, and enjoy a long life, free of disease and complications from trans fat. If the government steps in and helps, by issuing bans and rules, it will save lives.

The benefits far out way the risks, Trans fat needs to be eliminated from our diet. ReferencesBauer, L. R. (November-December 2009). Trans Fat Intake in Children: Risks and Recommendations. Pediatric Nursing, 35(6), 346-351. Brownell, K. (10/18/2006).

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