

# the SKINNY on **Trans Fats.**

Trans fats have been a hot topic lately.

The New York City Board of Health plans to ban trans fats from all of the city's restaurants, setting a limit of half a gram of trans fat per serving for any item on local restaurant menus.

Chicago is also considering a similar ban for restaurants with less than \$20 million in annual sales. In several smaller towns across the country, restaurant owners have voluntarily eliminated trans fats in menu items.

Cracking down on restaurants is just the latest battle in the war on trans fats.

Starting in January 2006, food companies are now required to disclose trans fat content on food labels. Knowing ahead of time that this requirement was approaching, many companies reformulated their products to contain smaller amounts of trans fats (unfortunately, however, some companies added more saturated fats instead).

So, exactly what are trans fats, and why are they under such scrutiny?

Trans fats are created when liquid oils are hydrogenated, a process used to make the oils more solid, and have a longer shelf life. These hydrogenated fats are most often found in foods such as margarine, baked goods, and fried foods. And, like saturated fats, trans fats are linked to a rise in LDL (bad) cholesterol, and they've also been known to cause a drop in HDL (good) cholesterol levels.

### Keep Trans Fats to a Minimum

The American Heart Association guidelines say that a person's intake of trans fat as well as saturated fat should be as low as possible. And, a recent review in the *New England Journal of Medicine* estimates that "near elimination of trans fats might prevent 72,000 to 228,000 coronary-related events each year."

It's important for consumers to be aware that simply because a food doesn't contain trans fats doesn't mean it's automatically healthy. Trans-free baked goods can still contain plenty of added sugars and refined carbohydrates. And trans-free fried foods are still just that - fried foods, packing in more fat and calories than their grilled or baked counterparts.

The bottom line is that trans fats are just one piece of the bigger nutrition picture. So while you're scanning labels for trans fat content, don't forget to use common sense. Remember to be mindful of added sugars and refined grains. And, continue to seek out foods that are high in fiber, protein, omega 3's, and antioxidant-rich phytochemicals. And, trust your judgement. If a trans-free donut seems too good to be true, it probably is!



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