

Position Statement

TRANS FATTY ACIDS ('TRANS FAT') AND HEART DISEASE AND STROKE

A lot of discussion and media attention has focused on the health effects of trans fat, but it is difficult to make sense of how or if trans fat can be eaten as part of a healthy diet. The Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada is a leader in educating the public about the importance of eating a healthy and balanced diet. The following position statement was developed to help the public better understand trans fat, personal food choices, and their relationship to heart disease and stroke.

FACTS

- Your diet can influence your risk for heart disease and stroke. Eating habits that will lower your risk include eating a high-fibre, lower-fat diet, eating lots of vegetables and fruit, and eating portions of food that are in line with your level of physical activity.
- Lowering trans fat and saturated fat in your diet will help reduce your risk for heart disease and stroke.
- Simply lowering or eliminating trans fat in packaged food will not necessarily make the food we eat more nutritious. You should also be aware of the salt and sugar content of foods and the overall number of calories.
- Your overall risk of heart disease or stroke is determined by ALL of your risk factors. There are risk factors that you can and cannot control.
 - Risk factors that you can control include: smoking, physical inactivity, high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, obesity and diabetes.
 - Risk factors that you can't control include: age, gender, family history and ethnicity.
- You can reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke by knowing and controlling as many risk factors as possible.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada recommends that:

1. Accurate information about the nutritional value of foods and the health effects of lowering trans fat be made available to the public, to help consumers make informed and healthy choices.
2. Trans fat in processed foods be replaced as soon as possible and where feasible by healthy alternatives such as monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats rather than with equal amounts of saturated fat.
3. Canadians consume a healthy, balanced diet that includes:
 - foods from the four food groups in *Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating*;
 - 20-35% of total calories from fat (about 45-75 grams/day for a woman and about 60-105 grams/day for a man);
 - more polyunsaturated fat, especially omega-3 fatty acids (fatty fish, flaxseed, canola oil, soybean oil, nuts, liquid egg products, etc.) and monounsaturated fat (olive oil, canola oil, avocados, nuts etc.); and
 - lower amounts of trans fat and saturated fat.



BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Unsaturated fat, Saturated fat and Trans fat

Unsaturated fat

Unsaturated fat can help lower low density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol ('bad' cholesterol) levels. There are two types of unsaturated fat: monounsaturated and polyunsaturated.

Monounsaturated fat lowers LDL-cholesterol levels. It is found mainly in olive and canola oils and some soft, non-hydrogenated margarines.

There are two types of polyunsaturated fat: Omega-3 and Omega-6 fats:

- Omega-3 fat helps prevent blood from sticking and clotting and also helps lower triglycerides, decreasing the risk of heart disease and stroke. Omega-3 fat is found in fatty fish such as salmon, mackerel, herring and sardines as well as in flax and some newer products such as Omega-3 liquid eggs.
- Canadian diets tend to include high amounts of Omega-6 fat. This fat is liquid at room temperature and is found in foods that come from plants. Safflower, sunflower and corn oils are examples of Omega-6 fat. This fat is also found in some non-hydrogenated margarines and some nuts and seeds such as almonds, pecans, brazil nuts, sunflower seeds and sesame seeds. Omega-6 fat helps lower LDL-cholesterol ('bad' cholesterol), but when eaten in large amounts is thought to lower high density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol ("good" cholesterol). Omega-6 fat should be eaten in moderation since it still contributes to total amount of calories you eat.

Saturated fat

Saturated fat is solid at room temperature and generally comes from animal sources such as meat, poultry, and dairy foods. Plant sources of saturated fat are coconut oil, palm oil and palm kernel oil. Saturated fat can raise LDL-cholesterol ('bad' cholesterol) levels. Reducing your consumption of saturated fat is an important step in lowering your risk for heart disease and stroke. You can reduce the amount of saturated fat you eat by choosing lean meats, removing the skin from chicken and using lower fat dairy products. In addition, any cooking method that allows fat to drain off (e.g. broiling, grilling, roasting on a rack) helps further reduce the amount of saturated fat you eat.

Trans fat

A healthy diet limits the amount of trans fat. Trans fat is created when an unsaturated fat is processed or hydrogenated. Like saturated fat, trans fat raises LDL-cholesterol ('bad' cholesterol) levels. Trans fat is found in partially hydrogenated margarines, as well as in many crackers, cookies and commercially baked products, usually listed as "partially hydrogenated" or "vegetable oil shortening" in the ingredients. Partially hydrogenated vegetable oils are the biggest source of trans fat in the Canadian diet. Trans fats can also be found in deep fried foods from fast food outlets.

To help you identify trans fat and other ingredients in foods, there will be a new *Nutrition Facts* table on food labels in Canada by December 2005 for large food companies, and by December 2007 for smaller food companies. These tables will help you identify and limit your intake of products high in trans fat. In the meantime we advise you to look for the words "partially hydrogenated" or "vegetable oil shortening" in the ingredient list and to limit the amount of these types of oils in your diet.

For more information on heart healthy eating, visit www.heartandstroke.ca. To learn about our Health Check™ food information program, which will help you identify healthy food choices at the grocery store and other retailers, visit www.healthcheck.org.

APRIL 2004