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## **Latest developments with trans fatty acids**

In October 2007 the Secretary of State for Health requested that the Food Standards Agency (FSA) undertake a review of the evidence of the health impact of trans fats and trans fat legislation similar to that currently operating in New York and Denmark.

In response the FSA:

- Commissioned a review of the health evidence that has been considered by the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN)
- Held a stakeholder meeting to gather views and information on industry initiatives to reduce trans fats
- Re-estimated average intakes of trans fats using current levels in certain foods

They found:

- A moderate effect of trans fats on Coronary Heart Disease risk, but insufficient evidence regarding an association with other diseases (diabetes, obesity and cancer).
- Estimated UK intakes of trans fats are just 1% of food energy, only half SACN's maximum recommended average intake of 2% of food energy which is based on CHD risk
- The food industry in the UK was congratulated for its success in reducing the levels of trans fats in the foods on our shelves
- Americans are at increased risk of CHD from trans fats as US average intakes of trans fats are more than 2.5 times that in the UK. In 2000/2001, Denmark identified very high levels of trans fats in popular foods sold there. In the UK, voluntary industry action has considerably

reduced artificial trans fat levels in food and thus significantly reduced UK average dietary intakes. Currently trans fat levels in vegetable oils used as ingredients in the UK are at a minimum. Therefore, New York and Denmark are different to the current UK situation and trans fat legislation would be unlikely to deliver the same public health benefit here.

Therefore the current FSA policy on trans fats is:

- Providing dietary advice on how to reduce trans fats intakes and information on the types of foods in which they can be found
- Promotion of voluntary industry action including reformulation to reduce trans fats without increasing saturated fat levels (also linked with increased CHD risk)
- Enabling consumer choice through labelling of trans fats. The FSA is lobbying the EU Commission to allow trans fats labelling on foods.

### **What are trans fatty acids?**

Trans fatty acids (TFAs) are a type of fat, which is associated with raised serum cholesterol levels and coronary heart disease (CHD) risk. TFAs increase bad (LDL) cholesterol whilst reducing good (HDL) cholesterol. However, current intakes in the UK are not a major health concern and people should instead be looking to cut down on their saturated fat intake.

Some animal-derived foods, such as butter, milk and beef contain trans fatty acids at levels around 3-6%<sup>1</sup>. Hydrogenation is a process where liquid unsaturated oil can be turned into a solid saturated fat. Total hydrogenation gives typically less than 1% trans fats, however. Partial hydrogenation of an oil results in the formation of trans fats (up to 60%) as a by-product of the process. Partially hydrogenated vegetable oils are used to make some foods, such as biscuits, pastries, cakes and other processed foods.

For more information see [www.food.gov.uk](http://www.food.gov.uk)

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<sup>1</sup> EFSA opinion  
[http://www.efsa.europa.eu/EFSA/efsa\\_locale-178620753812\\_1178620767491.htm](http://www.efsa.europa.eu/EFSA/efsa_locale-178620753812_1178620767491.htm)