

Throw the *Trans* Fats Into the Garbage!

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The American FDA recently decided to ban (in three years time) all trans fats from food products sold in the United States. Let's hope that Canada is inspired by this decision because countless studies have clearly demonstrated the catastrophic impacts that these synthetic fats have regarding a variety of chronic diseases.

Trans fats are fatty materials produced by partial hydrogenation, an industrial process which modifies the structure of liquid vegetable oils and transforms them into a solid or semi-solid state. Over the years, these synthetic fats have become pillars of the processed food industry because they are very stable and they do not become rancid, thus permitting an increase in the length of time that a food product remains edible, all while providing agreeable taste and texture to the food.

Unfortunately, that which is good for the industry is not necessarily good for the health of consumers: a very large number of studies have conclusively shown that the consumption of foods containing these *trans* fats was associated with a significant increase in the risk of several diseases, particularly heart disease. For example, people who regularly consume *trans* fats have a 10 x greater risk of coronary disease, a consequence of the pro-inflammatory action of these fats and their negative impact on the levels of bad (LDL) and good (HDL) cholesterol. An increased risk of type 2 diabetes and of particular cancers (breast) were also observed, and some recent results suggest that *trans* fats could even diminish certain basic cognitive functions in young adults¹. Overall, the *trans* fats are truly edible poisons!

CANADIAN *TRANS* FATS

These extremely negative aspects of *trans* fats have led to a re-evaluation of their use by the processed food industry. In Canada, the approach used was to convince the industry to voluntarily reduce the contents of *trans* fats in their products, which led to a notable improvement in the situation. For example, while the average Canadian consumed about 10 g of *trans* fat per day in 2005, this quantity had decreased to 3.5 g by 2009. These efforts are commendable, but they remain insufficient: about 25% of all processed foods that are found in a grocery store today still contain too much *trans* fat, while some of these products are principally consumed by children (pastries, cookies, doughnuts, cake icing and microwave popcorn, amongst others). The situation became sufficiently worrying that the Canadian government decided in 2009 to stop monitoring the content of *trans* fats in food, a decision which benefited the interests of the industry to the detriment of the health of the Canadian population.



BAN *TRANS* FATS

Faced with an avalanche of scientific data demonstrating the harmful nature of *trans* fats, the American Food and Drug Administration (FDA) decided that it would adopt a much more firm position and totally ban the use of these fats by the food industry. According to the FDA, “partially hydrogenated vegetable oils, the principal dietary source of artificial *trans* fatty acids in the processed food industry, are not generally considered safe for use in human food.” In other words, the message from the FDA could not be more clear: the *trans* fats are not safe, even in weak doses, and we cannot avoid health problems by simply reducing their consumption but only by completely eliminating them from the diet. One can only respect this decision and hope that it contributes to ending the ambiguity found in the Canadian response to these toxic fats.

In the meantime, each of us can limit as much as possible the intake of *trans* fats by diminishing our consumption of processed, transformed foods while at the same time paying close attention to the nutritional information on their food labels as well as to the lists of ingredients. Every product which contains a “hydrogenated (or partially hydrogenated) vegetable oil” or “shortening” contains *trans* fats, and the closer this ingredient is to the beginning of the list, the greater the content of *trans* fats present.

⁽¹⁾ Golomb BA and Bui AK. A Fat to Forget: *Trans* Fat Consumption and Memory. *PLoS One* 2015;10:e0128129.