

# TRANS FATS IN FOODS AND IN THE OVERALL DIET OF THE UNION POPULATION

## WHAT ARE TRANS FATS?

Trans fats are a particular type of fats that may be produced industrially as partially hydrogenated oils. Trans fats can also be naturally present in the fat of cows, sheep or goats, such as in meat or dairy products.

## WHY A REPORT ON TRANS FATS?

Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the Union and a high intake of trans fats seriously increases the risk of heart disease - more than any other nutrient on a per calorie basis. When adopting the Food Information Regulation<sup>1</sup>, the legislators asked the Commission to produce a report on trans fats in foods and in the overall diet of the Union population.

The risk of dying from **HEART DISEASE** is between **20 to 32%** higher when 2% of the daily eaten energy is consumed as trans fats as compared to different other fats or carbohydrates.

## WHAT ARE THE RECOMMENDATIONS?

The European Food Safety Authority concluded that the intake of trans fats should be as low as possible while eating a healthy diet.

The World Health Organization recommends consuming no more than **1%** of the daily energy intake as trans fats

For an adult consuming 2 000 kcal per day, this would mean not more than **2.2** grams per day

## HOW CAN TRANS FATS BE REDUCED?

Trans fats in industrially produced fats can be technically reduced and alternative fats and oils for food production exist, while the proportion of natural trans fats in animal fats is limited, relatively stable and reducing them is not possible. Trans fats levels in food and population intakes can broadly be limited either by legislative actions or by voluntary measures. Legislative measures may include limiting the content of trans fats in foods or require that trans fats content is included in labelling.

In the  
EU



Denmark



Austria



Hungary



Latvia

have limited the trans fats content in foods to maximum of



Food producers may also **VOLUNTARILY** reduce the trans fats content of their foods.

The majority of food products analysed in the EU contain less than 2 grams of trans fats per 100 grams of fat. In many of these the level is even below 0.5 grams trans fats per 100 grams of fat or trans fats cannot be found at all.

**HOWEVER** data also shows that there are still products on the European food market with high levels:

**40-50g\***

**>2g\***



both pre-packed and non pre-packed such as **bakery products**



products such as **biscuits/ popcorn**

\*per 100g of fats

## WHICH FOODS CONTAIN TRANS FATS?

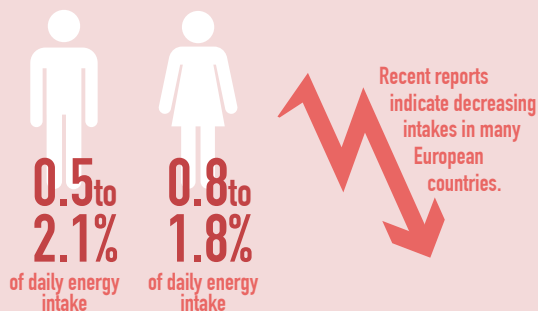
Industrial trans fats levels have been decreasing in selected food groups in the past decades but not uniformly across European countries. In some Central and Southern European countries, industrial trans fats levels in pre-packaged biscuits, cakes and wafers have not dropped meaningfully since mid-2000.

Products with high industrial trans fats content were found in nine European countries (EU countries - Sweden, Croatia, Poland, Bulgaria and Slovenia). This suggests that in certain parts of the EU little progress has been made.

<sup>1</sup> Regulation (EC) No 1169/2011

## WHO IS AFFECTED?

Average intakes of trans fats



Average daily intake of trans fats is **below 1%** of daily energy intake

in **9** EU countries for which data was available

# BUT

population groups may exceed or be at risk of exceeding levels recommended by the World Health Organization

citizens 18-30yrs

participants of a study in Spain

low income citizens

participants of a British low income diet and nutrition survey

university students

participants of a study in Croatia

DEVELOPMENT SINCE MID 1990s

## IS FURTHER ACTION RECOMMENDED?

Although average intake in the EU has been reported to be below nationally and internationally recommended levels, this is not true for all population groups. Food products with a high industrial trans fats content are available on the market and there are public health gains to be reaped by reducing intake.

The potential health benefits but also the different potential burdens on producers are analysed for the following measures aimed at addressing trans fats consumption:

### THE INTRODUCTION OF:



**mandatory labelling**  
of trans fats content



**a legislation** that  
limits trans fats content  
in food



**voluntary industry agreements** aimed at  
reducing trans fats in food at EU level



**EU guidance** for setting  
national legal limits on trans fats  
content in food

Alternatively, action could be left to the national level and to voluntary reduction efforts.

The assessment suggests that limiting the industrial trans fats content of foods by law would be the most effective measure in terms of public health, consumer protection and compatibility with the internal market. The way in which this could be technically put into practice would require further investigation.

### FURTHER INVESTIGATION NEEDED:



- collecting more information
- developing a fuller analysis of the magnitude of the problem and the different possible solutions
- analysing the option of introducing a legislative limit of industrial trans fats

The Commission intends to rapidly launch a public consultation and carry out an impact assessment. This will allow the Commission to take an informed policy decision in the future.

## WHAT CAN YOU DO TO REDUCE YOUR TRANS FAT INTAKE?

Currently, consumers can see from a product's list of ingredients whether it contains partially hydrogenated oils. If so, industrial trans fats could be present - although an exact estimate of the trans fat content is not possible.