

## Trans fat

### What is trans fat?

Trans fat is a type of unsaturated fat that behaves like a saturated fat because of its chemical structure. There are two types of trans fat.

**Naturally occurring trans fats** are caused by the way that some animals, such as cattle, sheep and goats, digest their food (the 'ruminating' process).

**Artificial, synthetic, industrial or manufactured trans fats** are caused by the way some fats and oils are processed.

### Why is trans fat bad?

Trans fat raises your low density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol ("bad" blood cholesterol) and lowers your high density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol ("good" blood cholesterol). Overall, this increases your total blood cholesterol level.

A high total blood cholesterol level is a major risk factor for heart disease (the leading single cause of death in Australia).

### What foods contain trans fat?

There are very small amounts of naturally occurring trans fat in dairy products, and in beef, veal, lamb and mutton and their products.

Manufactured trans fat is found in foods that use hydrogenated or partially hydrogenated vegetable fats to increase the shelf life and flavour stability of foods. These foods include deep-fried foods, some take-away meals and baked goods, such as pies, pastries, cakes, biscuits and buns.

In Australia, spreads and margarines with the Heart Foundation Tick have ongoing random testing to make sure that their levels of trans fat, saturated fat and salt remain within strict limits.

### How can I reduce the amount of trans fat I eat?

The best ways to reduce the amount of trans fat that you eat are to enjoy healthy eating and choose foods with the Heart Foundation Tick.

While it is important that you reduce the amount of trans fat you eat, Australians eat a lot more saturated fat than trans fat. Saturated fat also contributes to heart disease, so you should choose foods with lower levels of both saturated and trans fat.

Here are some simple tips for achieving a healthy balanced diet low in saturated and trans fat.

- Use spreads and margarines made from canola, sunflower or olive oil, and dairy blends with the Heart Foundation Tick instead of butter. Spread thinly so you can still see the bread.
- Cook with polyunsaturated or monounsaturated oils, such as canola, sunflower, soybean, olive, sesame and peanut oils. Measure out your oil with a teaspoon or use a spray oil.
- Grill, bake, poach, steam or stir fry rather than shallow or deep frying and roasting in oil so that you don't need to use a lot of fat.
- Select lean meat, poultry and game. Try to trim all visible fat from the meat before cooking. Remove the skin from chicken and turkey.
- Use reduced, low or no fat dairy products. Opt for cheeses that are lower in saturated fat, such as cottage cheese, ricotta and light tasty cheddar.
- Try to limit deep fried foods and fatty take-away foods to no more than once a week.
- Try to limit fatty snacks, such as crisps, cakes, pastries, biscuits and chocolate, to once a week.
- Choose foods with the Heart Foundation Tick where available.

Avoid foods that show "hydrogenated oils" or "partially hydrogenated vegetable oils" in the ingredients list. However, the law doesn't currently enforce companies to list these fats on labels. The Heart Foundation is lobbying government for mandatory labelling of trans fat but in the meantime, look for foods with the Heart Foundation Tick.

To earn the Heart Foundation Tick, vegetable oils and margarines must have no more than 1% trans fat as part of their total fat. All other foods with the Tick must have no more than 0.2 grams of trans fat per 100 grams.

## What is the Heart Foundation doing about trans fats?

Through the Heart Foundation Tick, we have been successfully challenging the food industry to remove trans fat from the foods they make. We have also made recommendations to the government about removing trans fat from the fast food industry and will continue to lobby the government for mandatory labelling of trans fats on foods purchased from supermarkets, restaurants, cafes and fast food outlets.

## Want to know more?

For more information on trans fat or your heart health, call our Health Information Service on 1300 36 27 87 (for the cost of a local call) or email [health@heartfoundation.org.au](mailto:health@heartfoundation.org.au).

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