

# Trans Fats

## Frequently asked questions

### What is trans fat?

Trans fat is a type of unsaturated fat that behaves more like a saturated fat in the body and in food processing because of its chemical structure.

### How are trans fats created?

Trans fats can be formed in three ways:

- by bacterial action in the gut of ruminant animals like cattle, sheep, goats and deer
- by hydrogenation which is a process used to produce solid and semi-solid fats from vegetable oils
- deodorisation, a necessary step in the refining of oils high in polyunsaturated fats.

### Where can trans fats be found?

Trans fats are found naturally in trace amounts in dairy products, beef, veal, lamb and mutton, but it is the manufactured trans fats that are of most concern. These are found in foods which use hydrogenated or partially hydrogenated vegetable fats such as baked products like pies, pastries, cakes, biscuits and buns. Years ago, most margarines had high levels of trans fats. This is no longer the case in Australia and those with the Tick are subject to ongoing random testing to ensure they remain compliant.

### Why do I need to be aware of trans fats?

Like saturated fats, trans fats can raise total blood cholesterol levels, as well as raise the LDL or 'bad' component of blood cholesterol. However, unlike the saturated fat they can also lower the 'good' HDL component of cholesterol. These both add to our risk of cardiovascular disease, which is still a leading cause of death for Australians.

### How can I reduce my trans fat intake?

It is important for consumers to reduce their intake of trans fat. But we consume considerably more saturated fat than trans fat, and therefore saturated fat has a greater overall impact on our risk of heart disease. We should be choosing foods with lower levels of both saturated and trans fat in them.

If consumers follow the Heart Foundation healthy eating messages like selecting lean meat, trimmed of all visible fat, choosing reduced or low fat dairy products, and limiting the intake of baked foods such as cakes, pastries, pies, and biscuits to once per week, they will not only lower the amount of saturated fat, but also the amount of trans fat they consume.

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When shopping, read the ingredients list. Some foods may have ‘partially hydrogenated vegetable oils’ or ‘hydrogenated oils’ listed in the ingredients list—these should be avoided. However, because companies are not currently required by law to list these fats, the only way you can tell for sure is to look for the Heart Foundation Tick.

Every food with the Tick has been independently tested to meet the Heart Foundation’s strict nutrition and labelling standards. Random audits ensure that Tick foods remain compliant.

### **What is being done to get trans fats out of the foods we eat?**

The Heart Foundation through its Tick has been successfully challenging the food industry to remove trans fat from the foods they produce.

We have provided recommendation to government about the removal of trans fat from the fast food industry and we will continue to lobby government for the mandatory labelling of trans fats on foods in supermarkets and eaten out..

### **What does ‘virtually trans fat free’ mean?**

‘Virtually trans free’ means that a food has less than 1% of its total fat as trans fat. In other countries they are permitted to call this ‘trans fat free’.