

# Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

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## “Trans Fat Facts”

According to FDA estimates, Americans consumed an average of one gram of trans fats per day in 2012, but according to the Institute of Medicine, trans fats are unsafe at any level. Trans fats are formed when hydrogen is added to vegetable oil during food processing in order to make it solidify. This process, known as hydrogenation, makes fats less likely to spoil, so foods stay fresh longer, have a longer shelf life and also have a less greasy feel. But, the end result is a completely unnatural fat that can cause cellular dysfunction. Trans fats, found in margarine, vegetable shortening, and partially hydrogenated vegetable oils were promoted and popularized as a “healthier alternative” to saturated animal fats like butter and lard in the 1950’s. But, its beginnings go back 100 years to Proctor & Gamble’s creation of Crisco in 1911. According to the CDC director, an estimated 5,000 Americans die from heart disease caused by dietary trans fats each year, and another 15,000 will get heart disease as a result of eating too many trans fats. Other CDC statistics suggest that as many as 20,000 heart attacks could be avoided each year by eliminating trans fats from the food supply. Research has also found that trans fats are linked to cancer, bone problems, hormonal imbalance and skin disease; infertility, difficulties in pregnancy and problems with lactation; low birth weight, growth problems, and learning disabilities in children. Increasing your daily consumption of trans fats from 2 grams to 4.67 grams reportedly increases your risk of heart disease by 30 percent. Check the ingredients label and look for partially hydrogenated oil. If the product lists this ingredient, it likely contains trans fats. According to the FDA, 12 percent of all processed foods contain at least one partially hydrogenated oil, aka trans fats. Still, virtually any food made with or fried in partially hydrogenated oils could potentially contain trans fats, even if it’s not listed on the label. A loophole allows food manufacturers to avoid listing trans fats on the label if it contains less than half a gram per serving. So, this is why some foods have such ridiculously tiny serving sizes. On November 7, 2013, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) announced it is now considering removing partially hydrogenated oils, the main source of trans fats, from the list of “generally recognized as safe” (GRAS) ingredients.

In the America that I love, changes in medical recommendations are slow in coming. For 60 years, saturated animal fats have been arguably, wrongfully accused of causing heart disease, despite mounting evidence showing that saturated fat is actually critical for optimal health, while trans fats are the dietary fat culprit causing heart disease.

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