TRANSPORTS 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\(^1\), the legislators asked the Commission to produce a report on trans fats in foods and in the overall diet of the Union population.

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.

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 2 g per 100 g of fats by law. 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:

- 40-50 g* per 100g of fats
- both pre-packed and non pre-packed such as bakery products
- products such as biscuits/ popcorn

INDUSTRIAL TRANSM 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.

1 Regulation (EC) No 1169/2011
WHO IS AFFECTED?

Average intakes of trans fats

Recent reports indicate decreasing intakes in many European countries.

- Men: 0.5 to 2.1% of daily energy intake
- Women: 0.8 to 1.8% of daily energy intake

Average daily intake of trans fats is below 1% of daily energy intake in 9 EU countries for which data was available.

BUT

- Citizens 18-30 yrs
- Low income citizens
- Participants of a study in Spain
- Participants of a study in Croatia
- University students
- Low income citizens from a British low income diet and nutrition survey
- 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 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.

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https://ec.europa.eu/food/safety/labelling_nutrition/trans-fat-food_en