



Making Food Healthier and Healthier Food More Affordable: Trans Fat Reduction Rationale

Walmart Commitment

Eliminate all remaining industrially produced *trans* fats in packaged food products Walmart sells by 2015.

Working with suppliers over the next five years, Walmart plans to eliminate all remaining industrially produced *trans* fats from the products it sells. Currently, the FDA requires food companies to disclose *trans* fat on labels when a product has more than 0.5 grams of *trans* fat per serving, which can lead our customers to believe they are not consuming *trans* fats. We aspire to a higher standard, by monitoring ingredient lists to help move the industry to the finish line when it comes to eliminating any remaining industrially produced *trans* fats, specifically from partially hydrogenated fats and oils in packaged goods.

Suppliers will be asked to voluntarily fill out a scorecard annually so that Walmart can assess and report progress toward this target.

Target categories

Nutrition and ingredient information will be collected from more than 50 grocery categories, which include cakes, cookies, frozen meals, snacks and potatoes, and ready to eat cereal. Walmart will work with its suppliers to eliminate all partially hydrogenated fats and oils, which are the major source of industrially produced *trans* fats in the packaged products it sells.

Rationale

The 2005 Dietary Guidelines recommend Americans keep *trans*-fatty-acid consumption as low as possible².

Additionally, the American Dietetic Association, the Institutes of Medicine, and the National Cholesterol Education Project all recommend limiting dietary *trans*-fat intake from synthetic sources as much as possible, and the American Heart Association recommends limiting *trans* fats to one percent of energy³.

Impact

This will result in a significant decrease in the remaining industrially produced *trans* fats from the food purchased at Walmart.

Background

Definition

Trans fatty acids, or *trans* fats, are unsaturated fatty acids that contain at least one non-conjugated double bond in the *trans* configuration. Naturally occurring *trans* fats are present in foods that come from ruminant animals (e.g., cattle and sheep). Such foods include dairy products, beef, and lamb. The major source of industrially produced, or “synthetic” *trans* fatty acids is from partially hydrogenated fats and oils that are used to make shortening and commercially prepared baked goods, snack foods, fried foods, and margarine. Synthetic *trans* fatty acids, or *trans* fats, have been used by food manufacturers to create a desirable taste and texture and also are a cost-efficient solution with a long shelf-life¹.

Dietary Sources

According to the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, processed foods and oils provide approximately 80 percent of *trans* fats in the diet. The remaining 20 percent occurs naturally in food from animal sources. In 2005, the major dietary sources of *trans* fats included²:

- 40 percent - cakes, cookies, crackers, pies, breads
- 17 percent - margarine
- 8 percent - fried potatoes
- 5 percent - potato chips, corn chips, popcorn
- 4 percent - household shortening
- 6 percent – misc.



Current Intakes

The most recent available data from the 1994-1996 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey indicated that *trans* fat comprised 2.6 percent of energy intake, which is twice current recommendations².

Health Risks

Trans fats are believed to be nutritionally unnecessary, and epidemiologic evidence has shown that they are an important risk factor for cardiovascular disease³. In fact, a 2 percent absolute increase in energy intake from *trans* fat has been associated with a 23 percent increase in cardiovascular risk. While *trans* fat has been shown to have a significant negative impact on heart health, it is one of the primary causes of coronary heart disease^{3&4}.

According to an article published in the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, researchers estimate that reducing commercial *trans* fat intake by one percent from 2.1 percent of energy to 1.1 percent or near-elimination of *trans* fats from the diet could have a dramatic impact, potentially preventing 72,000 or 228,000 cardiovascular deaths per year in the United States, respectively³. Furthermore, in an *Atherosclerosis Supplements* article, Dr. Walter Willet reported that decreasing *trans* fat intake by two percent is estimated to result in a 20 percent decrease in new coronary heart disease cases.

Health Recommendations

Major professional sources, including the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, American Dietetic Association, American Heart Association, Institute of Medicine, and the National Cholesterol Education Program Adult Treatment Program, acknowledge that there is no medical rationale for allowing commercial *trans* fats in the diet and recommend limiting their consumption as much as possible³.

Regulations

The FDA requires all products to state the amount of *trans* fat per serving on the "Nutrition Facts" panel, but *trans* fats with <0.5 grams/serving can be listed as 0 grams.

Some consumer groups and researchers suggests that the Food and Drug Administration is allowing food manufacturers to engage in deception by labeling foods *trans* fat free as long as they have less than 0.5 grams of *trans* fats per serving. Additionally, some recommend that food manufacturers list the *trans* fat content in 0.1 gram increments, so consumers can calculate how many grams they're consuming⁶.



References

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