



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

Walmart Commitment

Eliminate all remaining industrial trans fats in packaged food products Walmart sells by 2015.

Working with suppliers over the next five years, Walmart plans to eliminate all remaining industrial 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 .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 industrial trans fats in packaged goods.

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

Target categories

Packaged food categories across the store will be targeted, and because a small amount of trans fat occurs naturally in foods such as beef, veal, lamb, and foods containing milk fat, such as butter, whole milk, cream, cheese and ice cream, Walmart will work with its suppliers to eliminate all "synthetic/industrial/added/artificial" 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 removal of industrial trans fats from the food purchased from 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. Sources of synthetic trans fatty acids include hydrogenated/partially hydrogenated vegetable 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 give 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.

However, some 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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