

Why do we Need to Comprehensively Prohibit the Manufacture and Use of Trans Fat-Rich Food?

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Studies over a period have concluded that using trans fatty acids (TFAs) predominantly produced as hydrogenated vegetable fats and oils has affected the health negatively in the form of Hypertension, heart diseases, obesity, colon cancer and diabetes etc. The evidence says that trans-fats cause an estimated 60000 deaths annually, so these should be to comprehensively prohibited in the interest of public health.

Introduction

Trans fatty acids (TFAS) are manufactured by a process known as hydrogenation in which hydrogen is added to vegetable oil to convert liquid fat to semi-solid fat or saturated fat. TFAs are also produced when the oil is reheated many times at high temperatures and reused. TFAs found naturally in the meat and dairy products are considered less harmful. Dairy products have 2 - 6% and meats have 3 - 9% TFAs.

Unnatural trans-fats found in solidified vegetable fats like vegetable ghee and margarine are produced by a chemical process and are dangerous to our health and are used in the preparation of snacks, bakery items and fried foods.

International scenario

As per "Thirteen General Programme of Work (GPW-13) 2019 - 2023, reduction in production and use of industrially-produced trans-fatty acids (TFA) from the diet is a priority. Countries need to implement WHO best-practice policy on TFAs to make their population healthier.

To reach the goal, WHO's REPLACE package is a plan for nations to reduce and eliminate artificially produced TFAs. It outlines six major action areas to reduce industrially-produced TFAs from the diet.

REPLACE

- RE Review Dietary Sources of Industrial produced trans-fat
- P Promotion of replacement
- L Legislate to enact regulatory actions, A Assess trans-fat content
- C Create Awareness

- E Enforce compliance with policies and regulations.

Currently, about 127 countries are working for trans-fat elimination. Denmark initiated it in the year 2003 and subsequently the model was adopted by several countries. In the month of May 2020, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MoAF), Turkey approved regulations to limit the content of trans fat to 2% in food intended for the final consumer. The regulation will be effective from January 1, 2021 and aligns with the European Union's policy. Best-practices on TFA are being followed in Latvia, Slovenia, Canada, Thailand, Turkey, EU, USA Peru, Saudi Arabia and Uruguay etc.

The scenario in India on TFAs

It is proposed by the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India, (FSSAI) to reduce the limit of TFAs in packed food items to 3% by 2021 and to 2% by 2022, a year in the advance of the global target.

FSSAI has allowed the food manufacturers with effect from July 2019 to use "Trans Fat-Free" logo, if they use industrial trans-fat 0.2 gm of 100gm to encourage them.

Health risks of trans fatty acids

Underlined risks are reportedly found with the high intake of TFAs:

- Cardiovascular diseases: The research has depicted that people using food high in TFAs show relatively high levels of serum cholesterol and prevalence of coronary heart disease in them is high.
- Diabetes: It has been reported that the chances of type-II diabetes is more with high TFA use.
- Breast cancer: It is reported that women with high serum levels TFAs have two times the risk of getting breast cancer.
- Colon cancer: It is reported that elderly people not on NSAIDs were at a 50% greater risk of getting colon cancer if they take diet high in TFAs.
- Pregnancy: TFAs were found in the same levels in the blood of newborn infants as in that of mothers in the latest studies. So, chances of health risks are similar.
- Obesity: Research indicates that high TFAs intake may increase midline obesity leading to weight gain.
- Allergy: A correlation was found between the intake of high TFAs and asthma, allergic cold & eczema in adolescents.

Recommendations

All Governments must take urgent steps to comprehensively prohibit the manufacture and use of Trans fat-rich food to save their citizens from ill health.

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