



Trans Fat: Soon to be banned?

The FDA made an announcement recently that could be interpreted as a pending ban on trans fat in our food. While the word “ban” isn’t exactly accurate, the new direction the FDA is taking could mean a big change for foods that contain artificial trans fats.



What are trans fats?

Trans fat is a type of fat that is found in processed oils and in some animal products. You will find most trans fats in foods that contain partially hydrogenated oil as an ingredient, such as baked goods and snack products. Trans fats in our diet have been associated with increased risk of heart disease and other health risks, and current recommendations are to consume as little of them as possible.



What did the FDA say?

The FDA recently announced that it is considering removing the GRAS (generally recognized as safe) status that partially hydrogenated oils (PHOs) currently have for use in food. PHOs are the main source of artificial trans fat in our food supply. Declaring that PHOs are no longer “generally recognized as safe” would mean that food manufacturers would have to seek FDA approval before selling any food that contains PHOs. Comments will be accepted on the FDA’s proposal through January 7th, after which a final decision will be made.



Bottom Line

If PHOs lose their GRAS status, they will likely disappear from our food supply, resulting in a drastic reduction in the amount of trans fat in the foods we eat. In theory, this should help to improve health overall. It is important to remember, however, that other fats and food ingredients play roles in our health as well. If foods that contained PHOs are replaced with foods that are higher in calories overall or higher in other “bad” fats, we may not see as many health benefits as we would hope.



REFERENCES:

1. Tentative Determination Regarding Partially Hydrogenated Oils; Request for Comments and for Scientific Data and Information. Docket No. FDA-2013-N-1317. Available at: <https://federalregister.gov/a/2013-26854>.
2. FDA Targets Trans Fat in Processed Foods. FDA Consumer Health Information. U.S. Food and Drug Administration, November 2013. Available at www.fda.gov/consumer.

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