

# Trans Fat Question and Answer Sheet

## What is trans fat?

Trans fat is a specific type of fat. It is found naturally in animal products such as meat and butter. It is also formed through a chemical process when hydrogen is added to liquid vegetable oil to make the oil solid. The process is called hydrogenation. Hydrogenation increases the shelf life, texture and flavor stability of foods containing these fats. Once hydrogenated, oils lose the health benefits associated with small amounts of [unsaturated fats](#), such as lowering cholesterol levels. In the body, trans fats act similar to [saturated fats](#), increasing the risk for heart disease.

## Where will I find trans fat?

Trans fat can be found in vegetable shortenings, some margarines, crackers, cookies, snack foods and other foods made with or fried in partially hydrogenated oils. Unlike other fats, the majority of trans fats are created when food manufacturers turn liquid oils into solid fats like shortening and hard margarine. A small amount of trans fat is found naturally, primarily in some animal-based foods.

## Do dietary supplements contain trans fat?

Would it surprise you to know that some dietary supplements, such as energy and nutrition bars and drinks, contain trans fat from partially hydrogenated vegetable oil, as well as saturated fat or cholesterol? It's true. As a result of the new label requirement, if a dietary supplement contains 0.5 grams or more trans or saturated fat, dietary supplement manufacturers must list the amounts on the packaging. So check the label to be sure your health foods are healthy.

## How does trans fat affect our health?

Scientific evidence shows that consuming trans fat raises the level of cholesterol called low-density lipoprotein (LDL), increasing risk for coronary heart disease (CHD). Saturated fat is the main dietary cause of high LDL levels. Heart disease is a leading cause of death among Anne Arundel County residents.

  
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### Does this mean I should avoid all fats?

No. Fat is a major source of energy for the body and aids in the absorption of vitamins A, D, E and K. Both animal- and plant-derived food products contain fat. When eaten in a small amount, fat is important for proper growth, development and maintenance of good health. As a food ingredient, fat provides taste, consistency and stability and helps you feel full. Fats are especially important for children less than two years old who are active and growing fast.

Unsaturated fats ([monounsaturated](#) and [polyunsaturated](#)) can be healthy in reasonable amounts. Saturated fats and trans fats raise LDL (“bad”) cholesterol levels in the blood. Food containing cholesterol also contributes to heart disease. Choose foods low in saturated fat, trans fat and cholesterol as part of a healthy diet.

### Is there an amount of trans fat in food items considered to be harmful to a person’s health?

Yes. The American Heart Association recommends limiting trans fat to no more than one percent of daily total caloric intake. The safest recommendation is to only eat foods that do not have any trans fat. In spite of the significant health risks, consumers are now eating more fats containing trans fat, amounting to about 3 percent of total daily calories. Health experts say 20-30 percent of total calories should come from fat with less than 10 percent of the calories coming from saturated fat.

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