Vandemoortele
shaping a tasty future

Our position on trans fats

Key message

In the European Union, trans fatty acids (trans fats) in vegetable margarines and fats no longer constitute a public health concern. This is thanks to the food industry's ongoing and voluntary efforts over recent decades to reformulate food products so that they contain fewer trans fatty acids.

Background

Oils and fats are an essential part of a healthy and well-balanced diet. Together with carbohydrates and proteins, fats provide most of the energy in our diet. However, not all fats are healthy for us.

Trans fats – also known as trans fatty acids or TFAs – are the most concerned. They are a type of unsaturated fat that occurs in both animal and vegetable fats. TFAs in animal fat occur naturally, and are formed by the microbial flora in the stomach of ruminants, such as cows, goats and sheep. These TFAs are present in the milk, butter, cheese and meat products derived from these animals. Most TFAs in vegetable fat are formed when vegetable oils are converted into solid fats in a process called partial hydrogenation. TFAs in vegetable fats are called industrial TFAs.

The TFAs present in animal and vegetable fats are chemically identical to each other but differ in the quantities in which they occur. According to the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), there is no scientific evidence suggesting that, when consumed in the same amounts, TFAs in animal and vegetable fats differ in how they affect health.[1]

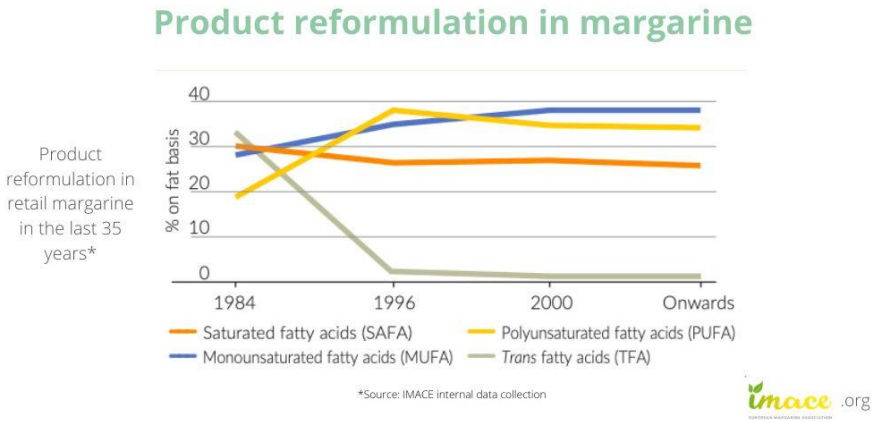
However, whether in animal or vegetable fat, TFAs do have a negative impact on health, specifically on cholesterol levels. Consuming TFAs increases not only the total level of cholesterol in the blood but also low-density lipoprotein cholesterol (LDL-cholesterol or "bad cholesterol"). At the same time, it decreases high-density lipid protein cholesterol (HDL-cholesterol or "good cholesterol").

The reduction in HDL-cholesterol specifically caused by TFAs means that, at

equal intakes, the ratio of total cholesterol to HDL-cholesterol increases much more compared to saturated fatty acids (SFAs).[2,3] Because of this, TFAs are considered a significant risk factor for cardiovascular disease compared to SFAs. The World Health Organisation recommends limiting the intake of TFAs to less than 1% of total energy intake.[4]

In light of these concerns, most EU countries have lowered the use of industrial TFAs in food so that it is below the level that would create a public health concern.[5] This successful result was achieved by the voluntary efforts of the food industry to reformulate products and by optimisation of production processes.

IMACE, the European Margarine Association, has shown that the removal of trans fatty acids in retail margarines and spreads has been accompanied by other beneficial changes: the level of mono-and polyunsaturated fatty acids has consistently increased, while the level of saturated fatty acids reduced.[6]



In 2019, the EU translated the health concerns on TFAs into legislation.[7] The EU Regulation n° 2019/649 sets a maximum on industrial TFAs in food of 2 grams per 100 grams of fat. Food which does not comply with this Regulation cannot be placed on the market any more after April 1, 2021.

Our position

Vandemoortele recognises that TFAs, both from animal and vegetable fat, have a negative effect on human health, and that their presence needs to be reduced to below the level that make them a public health concern.

Over the past decades, due to extensive innovation and technological efforts, the levels of industrial TFAs in our products – in bakery products as well as in margarines and fats - have been brought down to below 2% of the total fat content. At the same time, the sum of SFAs and TFAs has not increased. We were therefore pleased to see that in 2019 the European Commission put a legal limit in the content of industrially produced trans fats in food intended for the final consumer of 2 grams per 100 grams of fat.

---

[1] EFSA Panel on Dietetic Products, Nutrition, and Allergies (NDA); Scientific Opinion on Dietary Reference Values for fats, including saturated fatty acids, polyunsaturated fatty acids, monounsaturated fatty acids, trans fatty acids, and cholesterol. EFSA Publication. Parma, Italy: European Food Safety Authority, 2010. 107 p. (The EFSA Journal; No. 1461).

[2] Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council regarding trans fats in foods and in the overall diet of the Union population, European Commission, 2015.

[3] Li Y et al. (2015), Saturated Fats Compared With Unsaturated Fats and Sources of Carbohydrates in Relation to Risk of Coronary Heart Disease. A Prospective Cohort Study. J Am Coll Cardiol.; 66(14):1538-1548.

[4] Fats and Fatty Acids in Human Nutrition, Joint FAO/WHO Expert Consultation Report, November 2008.

[5] Wanders et al (2017), Trans Fat Intake and Its Dietary Sources in General Populations Worldwide: A Systematic Review, Nutrients 2017, 9, 840; doi:10.3390/nu9080840

[6] IMACE - The success story of reformulation efforts by the margarine sector - https://87337137-7f3f-4d45-8de0-7dec31568f49.filesusr.com/ugd/11950f_bda853efc36845d18fb623c1284b6c4f.pdf

[7] COMMISSION REGULATION (EU) 2019/ 649 - of 24 April 2019 - amending Annex III to Regulation (EC) No 1925 / 2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards trans-fat, other than trans-fat naturally occurring in fat of animal origin (europa.eu)