

Kerala takes the lead in tackling trans fat hazard

C. Maya

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The WHO recommends that trans fat intake be limited to less than 1% of total energy intake | Photo Credit: [H. Vibhu](#)

Food industry to be encouraged to meet statutory limits set for TFA, people to be made aware of its harmful effects

In a first, the Health Department has drawn up an action plan to generate public awareness on the harmful effects of trans fatty acids (TFA) in commercially available food items and to encourage the local food industry to meet the current statutory limits set for TFA.

The draft is expected to be finalised and released shortly.

The initiative has been launched by the department as various studies suggest that an unhealthy diet with a high TFA content is a significant factor that pushes up metabolic syndrome and the burden of its associated complications amongst Keralites.

Trans fatty acids

Action plan

Massive awareness campaigns

- On harmful effects of trans fat and HFSS¹ in foods at public places, hospitals, movie halls
- IEC² campaigns to rope in celebrities as ambassadors of healthy food



Enforcement activities

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| • Identify manufacturers and suppliers of PHVOs ³ to bakeries, restaurants; collect samples | • Monitor oils, fats used for frying, making snacks; test samples |
| • Monitor retail sales of PHVOs and test samples of various brands | • Testing of a range of food products to assess trans fat content |
| • Scientific sessions on TFA and training on using TFA-free alternatives | • Meetings with bakers, restaurant owners, unorganised sector FBOs ⁴ |
| | • Preparing guidelines on action to be taken against violators |

1. HIGH FAT, SUGAR, SALT
2. INFORMATION, EDUCATION, COMMUNICATION
3. PARTIALLY HYDROGENATED VEGETABLE OILS
4. FOOD BUSINESS OPERATORS

The year-long action plan has specific components on building awareness on trans fat amongst food business operators (FBOs) and giving them scientific sessions and training on how they can keep their food TFA-free.

Generating public awareness on the harmful effects of trans fat, especially among schoolchildren, is being given special focus so that the demand for healthier versions of their favourite foods come from the children themselves.

Clear timelines are being set as to when each of the components of the plan should be completed and when enforcement should begin.

Salt being a major contributor to hypertension and stroke, the action plan also plans to address the high salt content in processed foods, pickles, papads and condiments by encouraging manufacturers to move to low sodium options.

Need for alternatives

“The food industry is willing to ditch partially hydrogenated vegetable oils (PHVOs, one of the main sources of TFA in industrially produced food) and switch to TFA-free margarine or shortening to produce baked goods. But we have to provide them alternative technologies and know-how on re-adjusting their recipes to maintain the taste and texture of their products.

The pickle industry is in agreement that good hygienic and manufacturing practices and low sodium options can reduce the salt content in their products,” a senior health official said.

Support for initiative

The department is being supported in this initiative by Vital Strategies, the nutrition wing of the World Bank, WHO, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), and the State Food Safety wing, which will be in charge of enforcement.

An experts’ group has been constituted for the implementation of the guidelines on TFA and salt reduction.

The action plan has been drawn up after high profile meetings involving health experts and FBOs.