

## **FSSAI's new policy limits trans fats to 2% in all oils & fats by Jan 2022**

Monday, 04 January, 2021

**Our Bureau, Mumbai**

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) announced that all edible refined oils, vanaspati, bakery shortening, margarines, vegetable fat spreads and mixed fat spreads may only contain 3 per cent or less trans fats by January 2021 and 2 per cent or less trans fats by January 2022. This is an important milestone since the World Health Organisation (WHO) has called for global elimination of trans fat by 2023.

Industrially produced trans fats are created artificially during the hydrogenation processes of vegetable oils, and result in partially hydrogenated vegetable oils (PHVOs).

PHVOs are a major source of trans fats in India and are found in vanaspati, margarines, and shortenings. Vanaspati is used in preparation of Indian traditional sweets (mithais) such as laddoo, imarti, jalebi, and deep-fried foods such as aloo tikki and bhatura. Margarine and bakery shortenings are the most common fats used in baked goods such as cakes, pastries, and puffs.

Some trans fats are also formed during manufacturing process when high temperature refinement process is used to create vegetable oils. Experts in the edible oil industry say that technologies are available to make trans fats-free products for baking and frying.

Consumption of trans fats is associated with increased risk of heart diseases. It is estimated that the 2017 global market volume of partially hydrogenated oils – the main source of industrially produced trans-fatty acids in food – was approximately 13.6 million tonnes. Eliminating industrially produced trans-fatty acids can save 17 million lives over the next 25 years. Regulation and enforcement are the only ways to remove this toxic ingredient from the supply.

There is a sizeable unorganised or informal food producer and supply network in India. CAG's research and interaction with people who are a part of this network indicate that there is a need to create more awareness about harmful effects of trans fat.

This regulation will help strengthen CAG's advocacy efforts in Tamil Nadu. According to 2017 estimates, India has the highest burden of heart disease deaths due to high trans fat intake out of all countries in the world. More than 1.5 million deaths each year due to coronary heart disease, and nearly 5 per cent of these deaths each year (71,000) can be attributed to trans fats intake.

According to WHO's REPLACE second annual report released in September 2020, around 40 countries have already enacted the best practice policies to eliminate trans fats. These best practice policies limit industrially produced levels of trans fats to 2 per cent or less of total fats in all foods.

Dr Arunachalam, interventional cardiologist, Chennai, said, "Consumption of trans fat can have an unhealthy impact on cholesterol levels, ie. increase the LDL cholesterol and decrease the HDL cholesterol. There is also increased risk of heart attacks, stroke, and type 2 diabetes. The government's decision to reduce trans fat by 2 per cent is a welcome move."

The new regulations announced by FSSAI will bring levels of trans fats in all fats and oils down to the level recommended by the WHO. In addition, in 2019, FSSAI drafted another regulation that limited trans fats in all foods, which is still to be enacted. Once adopted, this additional regulation will place India in the ranks of countries with best practice trans fat policies in place, according to WHO standards.

Consumer organisations' leaders have also welcomed the new regulations passed by FSSAI. Saroja S, Citizen Consumer and civic Action Group, Chennai, said, "CAG has been working with food safety officials, food business operators, restaurant and hotel owners, and consumer groups to strengthen the ground-level understanding of effects of trans fat consumption. FSSAI will have to develop a strong enforcement plan including surveillance of oils and fats for trans fats, and improving lab capacities for testing trans fats."

"The trans fats limit is in line with FSSAI's regulation to support a healthy India, and also supports the Eat Right India movement-- a flagship programme focusing on safe, healthy and sustainable food environment" says Arun Singhal, CEO, FSSAI, "The Eat Right India movement has been recognized as one of the world's most aspiring program by Rockefeller Foundation."