

Food Safety Department preparing for WHO-aided monitoring programme

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THIRUVANANTHAPURAM: Amid concerns over the health risks posed by trans fats in foods, the Food Safety Department is preparing for a WHO-assisted monitoring programme beginning with a sampling.

Trans fat or trans fatty acid is an unsaturated fatty acid present in margarine and vegetable oils when they are hydrogenated for solidifying. Hydrogenated oils give longer shelf life and flavour stability for snack foods, baked foods and fried foods.

Trans fats are present in vegetable fats like margarine, ghee, vanaspati and bakery shortening. According to the FSSAI, trans fat intake results in over five lakh deaths due to cardiovascular diseases across the world every year. The food regulator aims to make India trans-fat-free by 2022, a year ahead of the target set by the World Health Organisation for its elimination. The country's current permissible level of trans fat in food is five per cent by weight.

A sampling of margarine, vanaspati and bakery shortening by the State Food Safety Department had earlier found that 11 of the total 42 samples crossed the five per cent mark. The state regulator is now preparing for a more scientific sampling covering Ernakulam and Kozhikode, the districts having a large number of bakery and related manufacturing units. The WHO will bear the cost of the sample analysis.

“The sampling aims to have a better understanding of the level of trans fat present in the foods. The finding will help plan our future programmes,” said Mini A K, Joint Commissioner of Food Safety. The department will also study the health effects of interesterified oils, claimed to be a relatively safer alternative for hydrogenated oils.

Target 2022

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