



**Arun Singhal,**  
CEO, FSSAI, New Delhi

# How Trans Fat wrecks health havoc

*Consumption of trans fat alone acts as a significant risk factor for coronary heart disease events and mortality. Globally, eliminating industrially produced trans-fatty acids can save 17 million lives over the next 25 years. It is considered the worst type of fat one can consume. Reduction of trans fats is an absolute must and the entire world is making efforts in this direction. India has taken a big leap towards trans fat elimination by adopting the triple action strategy for reducing trans fats consumption.*

**A**s the world is advancing and systems are getting complexed, food choices are also changing drastically all over the world. Today, with rapid urbanisation and changing lifestyle, dietary patterns have shifted towards pre-packed foods, frozen foods, fast food including fried foods and desserts etc, which may be high in salt, sugar, fats and even trans fats.

Consumption of trans fat alone acts as a significant risk factor for coronary heart disease events and mortality. Globally, eliminating industrially produced trans-fatty acids can save 17 million lives over the next 25 years. It is considered the worst type of fat one can consume. Foods prepared using partially hydrogenated vegetable oils (vanaspati, margarine and bakery shortening) generally contain trans fats. The growing incidence of non-communicable diseases is a wakeup call for us to ensure we create a safer food system and understand why Trans Fats is a critical problem for our country.

In India, a variety of foods are prepared using these materials e.g., sweets (Jalebi, laddu etc.), bakery products (fan, patty, puff, cake, pastry etc.), which may contain trans fats. Furthermore, re-heating cooking oils can lead to formation of small amounts of trans fats; not only at commercial outlets but even at household levels. It also leads to formation of Total Polar Compounds (TPC) which are toxic in nature and cause severe health hazards such as hypertension, atherosclerosis, Alzheimer's disease, liver diseases.

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entire world is making efforts in this direction. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has mandated all countries to bring down the levels of trans fats from the food supply upto 2 per cent by the year 2023.

Thus, there is an utmost need to provide a healthy food environment that is trans fat free to enable people to adopt and maintain healthy dietary intakes. The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has used a multi-pronged approach towards constituting a 'Healthy India'. On one side, the Food Regulator is bringing regulations and persuading food businesses to limit the fat, sugar and salt content in foods, and eliminate trans fatty acids (TFA), while on the other side, through the Eat Right initiative and awareness programmes, the FSSAI is trying to generate awareness among consumers to reduce the consumption of foods containing high levels of fat, sugar and salt.

## India's Triple Action Strategy

India has taken a big leap towards trans fat elimination by adopting the triple action strategy for reducing trans fats consumption – Enforcement,



Engagement and Awareness.

### Enforcement

India took a step forward to follow the WHO's call to eliminate industrially produced trans fat from the food supply. The FSSAI has taken up the trans fat issue at priority with cohesive efforts directed towards best practices and policy framework. To control increased risk of non-communicable diseases, Regulation on Food Safety and Standards (Food Products Standards and Food Additives) Tenth Amendment Regulations, 2020 has been notified to limit industrial TFA to not more than 3 per cent in all fats and oils by January 2021 and not more than 2 per cent by January 2022. This regulation has also been extended to all food products (having edible oil/fat as an ingredient), to limit industrial TFA to 2 per cent from January 1, 2022 under the Food Safety and Standards (Prohibition and Restrictions on Sales) Second Amendment Regulations, 2021.

Another important aspect is to ensure that school children and youngsters develop healthy eating practices. Keeping this in mind, the FSSAI has notified the Food Safety and Standards (safe food and balanced diets for children in school) Regulations, 2020. With effect from July 1, 2021, it restricts the availability of foods high in saturated fat or trans fat or added sugar or sodium in school campuses or within 50 metres of the schools. This regulation prohibits the advertisement or marketing of food products, high in saturated fats or trans fats or added sugar or sodium within school campuses or within 50 meters radius. It also promotes consumption of safe and balanced diet in and around school campuses. A general guidance document for providing safe food and balanced diets and selection of right food items for children is also provided in the regulation.

While the regulatory action is mandatory, regulations alone don't really win any such kind of war, especially when it comes to changing behaviour.

### Engagement

To achieve a country free of industrially produced trans fats, the FSSAI is constantly working towards nudging food businesses to identify new technologies and ingredients to eliminate trans fats from the food supply chain. Engagement with all these stakeholders will ensure that trans-fat free or low trans fat products are made available to people.

However, there are certain challenges associated with hand holding and educating stakeholders to comply with the regulation on elimination of trans fat. The FSSAI has initiated the campaign 'India@75: Freedom from trans fats' that aims to bring all stakeholders together and to ease the implementation. A series of technical sessions/webinars have been conducted to sensitise stakeholders like industry associations, bakers and food businesses, chefs, restaurateurs and hoteliers, edible oil industry, sweet and namkeen manufacturers, laboratory networks and academic institutions. Each webinar was planned to target a specific target audience focusing on challenges faced by them towards making a shift to trans fat free products and do-able solutions through talks/sessions deliberated by global experts.

### Awareness

Elimination of trans fat is a vital part of the 'Eat Healthy' pillar of the Eat Right India movement. In addition to regulations on limiting trans fats and engagement with stakeholders, the FSSAI uses various mediums such as social media platforms, videos, public service messages, Eat Right Melas, among others, to make consumers aware about the harmful effects of trans fat and its elimination. It is extremely important to provide information to the public because unless they know what they are consuming they can't make any informed choice.

#### Some of the actions areas include:

- Mass awareness campaigns to reduce salt, fat and sugar in the diet, - like 'Aaj Se Thoda Kam' and 'Trans Fat Free India by 2022' and encourage consumers to voluntarily cut down on salt, sugar and saturated fat levels.
- Dedicated webpage under the Eat Right India website to make people aware about harmful effects of trans fats on our health.
- A mass media public service campaign 'Heart Attack Rewind'- a 30-second Public Service Announcement (PSA) with an aim to create awareness about the harmful effects of trans-fat by, reducing acceptability of industrially produced (IP) trans fat in



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foods, building public support for government action to eliminate IP trans fat and leading consumers to the the FSSAI website to seek more information about trans fat.

● A 'Trans Fat Free' logo was launched in October 2020, which can be voluntarily used by food business operators to empower consumers to make right food choices. Food establishments which use trans fat free oil and do not have industrial trans fat more than 0.2g/100g of food, in compliance with the Food Safety and Standards (Advertising and Claims) Regulations, 2018 can display 'Trans Fat Free' logo in their outlets and on their food products. This is marked as an important milestone in the movement against Trans Fats.

**HOW TO ELIMINATE TRANS FATS FROM OUR DIET?**



**At Home**

- Limit the consumption of baked/processed foods like biscuit/fan.
- Avoid using "Vanaspati" for cooking.
- Do not repeatedly reheat the oil or re-use the same oil for frying/cooking.



**When Shopping**

- Check **INGREDIENTS LIST** on the packaged food for the words like "partially hydrogenated vegetable oil", "hydrogenated vegetable oil" or "shortening" as these are the sources of trans fats.
- Avoid buying and consuming packaged food where "partially hydrogenated vegetable oil", "hydrogenated vegetable oil" or "shortening", is mentioned as any of the first three ingredients in **INGREDIENTS LIST**.
- Check the Nutrition Information Panel (NIP) on packaged food items for trans fat content.



**When Eating Out**

- Avoid foods that are prepared in vanaspati or margarine.
- Avoid consuming commercial fried foods like fried aloo chaat, french fries, samosa, bhatura etc. prepared in Vanaspati.
- Avoid baked/processed foods like cookies, chips, cake's and patty.

The FSSAI carried out a baseline survey in the month of June-2021 for presence of industrially produced trans fatty acid content in the select food categories in partnership with Quality Council of India (QCI). Samples of various packaged food items under six predefined food categories were collected from 419 cities/districts

across 34 States/Union Territories. Overall, only 84 samples, i.e. 1.34 per cent, have more than 3 per cent industrially produced trans fats from the total of 6,245 samples. This shows that the industry is on the right trajectory of becoming industrial trans fat free in the 75th year of India's independence.

### What is needed?

The FSSAI has been taking several measures to tackle the issue of trans fats, with an organised approach to ensure India achieves its target and create a model where everyone understands the problem of trans fats. However, to make it successful, specific steps need to be taken by other stakeholders. The FSSAI is providing technical assistance to specific stakeholders to move towards trans fat elimination.

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Sweet and namkeen manufacturers are being encouraged to maintain fat/oil quality and reduce the formation of trans fats during food preparation with the halwais and sweet manufacturers.

**Bakers and food businesses:** The FSSAI has appraised the bakery and packaged food sector about the regulation and the trans fat free sticker/logo by FSSAI. The FSSAI also connected Food Business Operators (FBOs) with the edible oil industry to introduce the trans fat free fats that can be used to reduce/eliminate the trans-fat content in their products.

**Analytical laboratories:** The FSSAI is in the process of strengthening the laboratory capacity for assessing trans fats in fats/oil/foods as per the global standards. In this regard the FSSAI connected the labs with experts from WHO headquarters to introduce the newly launched global protocol for assessment of TFA.

**Chefs, restaurateurs and hoteliers:** The FSSAI has always highlighted the crucial role of chefs, restaurateurs and hoteliers in providing healthy food options without trans-fat. To strengthen the skills of chefs, restaurateurs, and hoteliers, the FSSAI organised webinars, specifying strategies to replace trans-fat by choosing healthier cooking oil and altering cooking techniques, which are easy to adopt and benefit in the long run.

To keep up the momentum, the FSSAI will continue to rigorously monitor and ensure full compliance at field level by engaging intensively with food businesses; capacity building programmes targeted towards food businesses; augmenting lab capacity to accurately measure and monitor trans fats in foods; and to achieve the goal of freedom from trans-fat by 2022. **NS**