

Scientists Conclude Health Effects of Trans Fatty Acids Exaggerated

By ACSH Staff — October 30, 2006

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[See Jeff Stier on CNBC's Power Lunch](#) ^[1] on trans fats

New York, NY — October 30, 2006. An independent panel of scientists today concluded that the contribution of *Trans* Fatty Acids (TFAs) to the causation of heart disease has been greatly exaggerated. The American Council on Science and Health (ACSH), in the new publication “[Trans Fatty Acids and Heart Disease](#) ^[2],” states that the health implications of TFA consumption should be put in better perspective so that consumers can make informed decisions about how to protect themselves from heart disease.

There are multiple risk factors for heart disease — smoking, high blood pressure, elevated blood cholesterol, obesity, and diabetes are among them. It has been known for decades that saturated fats can raise the levels of LDL or “bad” cholesterol, and thus increase the risk of heart disease. Twenty years ago, it was believed that TFAs would be a healthier type of fat to use for many applications and many food producers substituted them for saturated fats. But more recent research indicates that TFAs can also raise levels of LDL cholesterol.

There are some data suggesting that TFAs may also decrease levels of HDL (“good”) cholesterol, but these data are not as strong. Nor are there data demonstrating that reducing or eliminating TFAs from the diet will actually reduce the toll of heart disease among Americans.

Regardless of these facts, there are calls for “zero tolerance” of TFAs in the food supply, and the FDA now requires that the amount of TFAs be included on nutrition facts labels.

According to Dr. Elizabeth Whelan, ACSH president, “This growing hysteria about *trans* fats as a confirmed key risk factor for heart disease — and the calls to remove them from all foods (zero tolerance) — are not consistent with the scientific knowledge on the subject.”

Added Dr. Gilbert L. Ross, ACSH medical director, “The heightened media attention now paid to *trans* fatty acids as a possible cause of heart disease distracts consumers from the three major known preventable causes of heart disease: cigarette smoking, high blood pressure, and unhealthy levels of LDL cholesterol and other blood lipids. In addition to these primary controllable risk factors, there are others, including diabetes, obesity, and genetic predisposition, that increase the risk of heart disease. Dietary *trans* fatty acids play a relatively small role in an individual's overall risk of heart disease.”

Dr. Ruth Kava, director of nutrition at ACSH, stated “Focusing on an individual ingredient as key to any major health problem draws attention away from the really important lifestyle issues — not smoking, consuming a balanced diet, and appropriate physical activity.”

ACSH believes nutrition policies should be based on moderation, balance, common sense, and sound science, not hyperbole. Since all fats are calorically dense (at 9 calories per gram), ACSH and other health authorities recommend that total fat-calorie consumption be limited to between 25 and 35% of total calories in the diet. Further, particularly for those at risk of unhealthy blood lipid levels, less than 8% of total calories should come from saturated and *trans* fats combined. It is best to choose fats that consist primarily of polyunsaturated or monounsaturated fatty acids whenever possible, rather than those that are high in saturated or *trans* fatty acids.

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The American Council on Science and Health is an independent, non-profit consumer education organization concerned with issues related to food, nutrition, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, lifestyle, the environment and health. For more information visit <http://www.acsh.org> [5] or <http://HealthFactsandFears.com> [6]

See also: testimony in NYC from 10/30/06 on trans fats [from Dr. Whelan](#) [7] and [from Dr. Kava](#) [8]

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