

# NUTRIGRAM

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## What Exactly Are Trans Fats?

In terms of basic chemistry, an artificial trans fat is formed when hydrogen is added in a specific way to the carbon molecules that make up vegetable oil—a process known as hydrogenation. Hydrogenation often involves turning liquid oils into solid fats like shortening and hard margarine. This increases the shelf life and flavor stability of foods containing these fats because the molecules themselves are more stable and rigid. Trans fats are therefore less prone to spoilage than naturally occurring fats.

### Where Are Trans Fats Found?

While a small amount of trans fat is found naturally, primarily in some animal-based foods, the majority of trans fat is artificial and found in vegetable shortenings, some margarines, crackers, cookies, snack foods, and other foods made with or fried in partially hydrogenated oils. According to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the major source of trans fat for American adults are as follows:

- ▶ 40% from cakes, cookies, crackers, pies, bread, etc.
- ▶ 21% from animal products
- ▶ 17% from margarine
- ▶ 8% fried potatoes or French fries
- ▶ 5% from potato chips, corn chips, popcorn
- ▶ 4% from shortening
- ▶ 3% from salad dressing
- ▶ 1% from breakfast cereal
- ▶ 1% from candy

\*Based on this information about adults, how much trans fat do you think you generally consume?

### Why Are Trans Fats Unhealthy?

Like saturated fat and dietary cholesterol, trans fat raises the LDL cholesterol (considered the “bad” cholesterol) that increases your risk for cardiovascular disease. Although saturated fat is the main dietary culprit that raises LDL, trans fat can contribute significantly. Trans fats can also lower HDL cholesterol, considered the “good” cholesterol, that is protective against heart disease. It is important to realize that trans fats tend to be consumed in highly processed foods that are likely also high in saturated fat and low in key nutrients, compounding the unhealthy effects.

### No Trans Fats in Your School

Did you know that we cook with non-hydrogenated canola and olive oils which do not contain trans fat when preparing the food served at your school?

Prepared by Susan Cooper, Dietetic Intern

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