

What you should know about TRANS FAT

By: Connie L. Bradshaw, RD, and Maureen M. McCarthy, RD



Blueberry Cobbler

Spring is here and it's time to reflect back on those New Year's resolutions we might have made to eat better and to avoid foods which contain unhealthy fats, specifically trans fat.

To help us make those better choices, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) required food companies to list trans fat content on the Nutrition Fact panel of all packaged foods as of January 1, 2006. Also, the Smart Spot symbol can be found on products and help identify foods that are low in trans fat, cholesterol, sodium and sugar. In addition, you can also determine how much trans fat is in the foods you purchase by checking the ingredients list. Words such as "shortening," "partially hydrogenated vegetable oil," and "hydrogenated vegetable oil," all translate into foods that contain trans fats.

Trans fat (trans fatty acid) is made when liquid vegetable oil goes through a chemical process called hydrogenation. In short, hydrogen is added to oils to make them more solid. Trans fat can be found in foods such as shortenings, margarines, cookies, crackers, snack foods, fried foods, doughnuts, pastries, baked goods, fried fast foods and other processed foods fried in or made with partially hydrogenated oils. Polyunsaturated fats (such as olive oil, canola oil, soybean oil and corn oil) have good effects on cholesterol levels, while saturated and trans fats have bad effects on cholesterol levels. A comprehensive National Academy of Science (NAS) study concluded that the consumption of trans fat raises LDL ("bad") cholesterol and lowers HDL ("good") cholesterol levels, which is directly linked to increased risk of heart disease, the leading cause of death in the United States. Although there is no dietary recommendation for trans fatty acids, the NAS study recommends the trans fat intake be "as low as possible while consuming a nutritionally adequate diet."

Remember that just because packaged foods contain "zero grams of trans fat" does not mean that it is a healthy food. Keeping saturated fats low and choosing low fat dairy and lean meats, as well as avoiding trans fats, can lower your risk of heart disease. Also, total fat intake is just as important as what type of fat we eat in our diet each day.

Now that you have a better understanding of how to make better choices by avoiding foods with trans fat, you can keep that New Year's resolution!

BLUEBERRY COBBLER 1 cup flour, sifted 1 1/2 teaspoons vanilla 1 1/2 teaspoons baking powder 16 ounces fresh blueberries 1/4 teaspoon salt (may substitute 16 ounces frozen blueberries or other frozen fruit, and reduce water to 1/2 cup only) 1/4 cup margarine, trans fat-free 1/2 cup sugar 1/3 cup sugar 2 egg whites slightly beaten 2 teaspoons lemon juice 1/2 cup milk, 1 percent 3/4 cup water Sift together flour, baking powder and salt. Set aside. In a separate bowl, cream margarine with sugar, and beat until light and fluffy. Add dry ingredients to this mixture, and then add egg whites, milk and vanilla. Batter will be thin. In a saucepan, combine blueberries, 1/3 cup sugar, lemon juice and water. Bring to a boil, stirring constantly, until sugar is dissolved. Simmer five minutes. Pour hot blueberry mixture into an 8 inch square glass pan. Spoon cobbler batter over this mixture. Bake at 375 degrees for 30 minutes. Serve warm with fat-free frozen yogurt. Serves 6. CALORIES PER SERVING: 230 FAT: 6 G TRANS FAT: 0 G CARBS: 41 G PROTEIN: 3 G