

ELIMINATE TRANS FATS. BE HEART HEALTHY

Neha Sivaraman and Alexandra Nuño

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines trans fat (or trans fatty acids, TFA) to be “unsaturated fatty acids that come from either industrial or natural sources,” and is produced industrially by adding hydrogen to liquid oils in a process called hydrogenation, which makes the liquid oil become solid (WHO, 2024). While there are no known health benefits of trans fat consumption, the WHO highlights a vital health outcome that is directly correlated with it: heart disease. Trans fats can lead to an increased risk of type 2 diabetes and stroke. Another serious health consequence is the increase of Low-Density Lipoprotein cholesterol (LDL), which is extremely harmful because LDL’s can build up on artery walls and clog them (Mayo Clinic, 2020). This leads to an association between trans fat consumption and a higher risk of heart attacks and coronary heart disease (Mayo Clinic, 2020). Thus, trans fat consumption leads to an overall increase in mortality, because cardiovascular diseases are the leading cause of death worldwide (WHO, 2024).

SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM

Policy changes regarding trans fats inclusion in foods and its consumption is a pressing and relevant issue in Mexico; research has shown that trans fat consumption is directly linked to coronary heart disease, insulin resistance, and type 2 diabetes, things that can be avoided if trans fat is completely eliminated from the diet. An important factor to consider when trying to implement safer trans-fat policies is ensuring that Mexican traditional foods can still be eaten without jeopardizing nutritional health - Mexican cuisine is not negatively impacted by these recommended changes.

POLICY ALTERNATIVES

- Current Mexican policy has stopped the production of industrially produced trans fatty acids (iTFA) in the Mexican food supply
 - Addendum to Mexico’s General Health Law: fatty acid content should not go past 2% of the total nutritional value of a food product
- Potential Additional Actions:
 - Adopt the World Health Organization’s recommendation regarding trans fat: **REPLACE**

Review dietary sources of industrially-produced trans fat and the landscape for required policy change.

Promote the replacement of industrially-produced trans fat with healthier fats and oils.

Legislate or enact regulatory actions to eliminate industrially-produced trans fat.

Assess and monitor trans fat content in the food supply and changes in trans fat consumption in the population.

Create awareness of the negative health impact of trans fat among policy-makers, producers, suppliers, and the public.

Enforce compliance with policies and regulations.

Adopted by the World Health Organization

ALLIANCE BETWEEN MEXICAN COMMUNITIES AND THEIR HEALTH

The aftermath of COVID-19 displayed a sense of unity among communities to improve their overall health, emphasizing the role of nutrition. The Noncommunicable Disease Alliance shared reports from 2020 on how Indigenous Oaxacans created a human barrier, blocking trucks delivering processed foods and beverages containing trans fat from entering their cities, to protect their traditional Mexican diets. This community force influenced policy as the Oaxacan government passed legislation to ban the sale of junk food to minors, and the neighboring state of Tabasco followed this approach. The health burdens associated with trans fat consumption encourage Mexican citizens to respond before trans fat can further harm their health and permeate their traditional foodways.