

Letters

Trans fats in ischaemic heart disease

To the Editor: Colleagues and consumers should be made aware of the need to restrict intake of trans fats. Trans fats which are chemically engineered decrease the level of desirable HDL cholesterol and increase harmful LDL cholesterol.

In South Africa the largest amount of trans fat consumed today is created by the processed food industry. Trans fats have displaced natural solid fats and liquid oils in many other areas as well, notably in the fast food, snack food, fried food and bakery industries and many margarines contain large amounts of trans fats.

Dariusz Mozaffarian, Harvard cardiologist, calculated that up to 22% of heart attacks in the United States were the result of trans fat consumption.¹

The major evidence for the influence of trans fats on coronary heart disease (CHD) comes from the Nurses' Health Study (NHS) a cohort study that has been following 120 000 female nurses since its inception in 1976. In this study, Hu and colleagues analysed data from 900 coronary events from the NHS population during 14 years of follow-up. They determined that the nurses' CHD risk roughly doubled for each 2% increase in trans fat calories consumed.²

Currently South African food labelling laws do not require trans fats to be shown separately, only that the total fat content be listed.

It is absolutely necessary for food labels to list the amounts of trans fats. Better yet, harmful trans fats should be eliminated from South Africa's food supply.

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References

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