



FSSAI agrees to reduce trans-fats in vanaspati, bakery to less than 2%

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Ashwani Maindola, New Delhi

FSSAI has, in principle, agreed to reduce the trans-fat content in vanaspati and bakery shortenings and margarines to less than two per cent, taking the call to further reduce the trans-fatty acid (TFA) content in food.

The decision was taken at a meeting in New Delhi of FSSAI officials and vanaspati and edible oil manufacturers. Public health experts and consumer organisations also took part in it.

In a statement, India's apex food regulator said, "It has been agreed that this plan will be implemented in a phased manner. That will effectively bring the level of trans-fats in food in the country to zero."

And with the consensus developed on the TFA level in fats or oils being less than two per cent, this would now be taken up by the food authority for approval, and a draft will be notified soon. The final regulation will take about three to four months.

Pawan Kumar Agarwal, chief executive officer, FSSAI, said, "Through this, we are planning to achieve less than two per cent TFA content by 2022, a year ahead of the global target to eliminate industrially-produced trans-fat from the food supply by the year 2023."

"We hope that this initiative will drive the market for trans-fat free products in the future. He further added that TFA reduction in partially-hydrogenated vegetable oils (PHVOs) from five per cent to two per cent will be carried out in a phased manner by the industry," he added.

"The industry would come on board by signing the agreement to reduce industrially-produced TFA content in fats/oils to less than two per cent by 2022. The FSSAI commits to facilitate industries in capacity-building for the smooth transition," Agarwal said.

Many countries around the world, such as Denmark, Chile, Norway, Singapore, South Africa and Ecuador, already limit trans-fats in all foods to two per cent, while a few other countries, such as Austria, Hungary and Latvia, limit it to the two per cent level with some exceptions.

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Recently, the United Nations' (UN) World Health Organization (WHO) gave a call to eliminate industrially-produced trans-fat from the food supply by 2023, and released an action package, REPLACE, for the same.

Industrially-produced trans-fatty acids are bad fats, created artificially during the hydrogenation process while making PHVOs, which are the major sources of trans-fatty acids in India.

These are majorly present in the following categories of fats/oils:

- Vanaspati: Used in preparation of mithai (such as laddoo, imarti and jalebi), deep-fried foods such as aloo tikki, etc.
- Margarine and bakery shortenings: Used in preparation of bakery products (cakes, pastries, puffs etc.)

Further, trans-fatty acids are also formed during repeated heating of fats/oils while deep frying at home and restaurants.

Research has shown that higher intakes of industrially produced trans-fatty acids (more than one per cent of the total energy intake) are associated with increased risk of high cholesterol and heart diseases.

Globally, over 5,00,000 deaths in 2010 were attributed to increased intake of trans-fatty acids. Industrially-produced trans-fatty acids can be easily eliminated by adopting newer technologies which allow the use of healthier oils in place of PHVOs at negligible costs.

Some amounts of trans-fatty acids are also present naturally in animal sources such as milk and dairy products.

“When consumed in moderation, the natural trans-fatty acids are not known to have adverse health effects,” said the apex regulator in the statement.