

FSSAI aiming to reduce hydrogenated trans fats in Indian food to 2%

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The apex food regulator, in the past one year, has launched a massive campaign against industrially produced trans fats to reduce it to 2% and has even taken a vow to completely eradicate it from the Indian food system. The FSSAI wants the country to reach the 2% level by 2022, though it is aiming at making it free from hydrogenated trans fats or industrially produced trans fats by 2022.

Further, in line with WHO's (World Health Organization's) programme called Replace, the FSSAI has initiated several programmes for this purpose, which includes sensitising the industry that uses these trans fats as emulsifier for various products, particularly, in the baking industry.

According to FSSAI, the industry has recognised the threat trans fats pose for a healthy diet system and therefore agrees with the plan. CEO FSSAI Pawan Agarwal points out that the industry wholeheartedly agrees to eliminate the trans fats and it would look for alternatives for manufacturing products.

Over the past decade, FSSAI has helped the industries work with 5% TFA limit. Now that is being brought down to 2%. This is being done on a voluntary basis right now but with strong nudging and regular communication with industry. FSSAI notes that the industry is quite positive about this and working towards necessary alterations in machinery, raw material, labour and so on. By 2022, it is hoped to eliminate TFA from Indian diets.

Experts feel that FSSAI has given them time. It's not impossible but there can be initial teething troubles or challenges. "However we should remember that the industry did bring TFA to 5% when the regulation was implemented. They will surely be able to further reduce it to 2%. They can engage with chefs to understand better or more healthy recipes to be mass produced etc. and also expand their investment in R&D to get a variety of options which are affordable, tasty yet healthy," said Susmita Chandra, External Expert Committee member, Fats and Oils division, FSSAI, and pool scientist and faculty, department of biotechnology Makaut, WB.

She added that since industrially hydrogenated fat is one of the most useful ones due to its longer shelf life and heat withstanding nature, a replacement was necessary to avoid generation of trans fat.

"One such way out is interesterified fat (IEF) produced enzymatically and being tested for its safe consumption. Already some of IEF is in the market for human use. Bringing one IEF in

market might be time-consuming because its safety has to be established before use,” she stated.

Not more than 2% total fat

According to FSSAI, what WHO recommends is that trans fats need to be eliminated totally. FSSAI recommends that product should not have more than 2% of total fat.

A senior official with FSSAI, said, “We are expediting the trans fats proposal. Need to make people aware of the harmful effects of trans fats. Nutritional labelling education needs to be carried out. Mandatory to mention exact amount of trans fats and saturated fatty oil content as per FSSAI now.”

The official added, “Have asked the industry to come up with alternatives; but main challenge is in the bakery products. Industry will do research and come up with healthier alternatives, hopefully. More than 800 samples have been collected from the four zones to know whether the industry is compliant with the industry regulations or not; this is being analysed.”

Partially Hydrogenated Oils (PHOs) are the main source of industrially-produced trans fats. These oils are most frequently found in – baked and fried foods – prepared or pre-packaged snacks – fried street and restaurant foods. Heating and frying oil at high temperatures leads to modest increases by 3.67 g/100g and by 3.57 g/100g respectively while there is no evidence that other cooking methods, e.g., baking, boiling and grilling, lead to increased trans fats concentrations.

WHO recommends that total TFA intake be limited to less than 1% of total energy intake, which translates to less than 2.2 g/day in a 2,000 calorie diet. The average consumption globally was estimated to be 1.4% of total energy in 2010, ranging from 0.2 to 6.5% of total energy across countries (0.13 to 4.3 gram per day for a 2,000 calorie diet).

According to a WHO report, India has been reported to contain 6% to 30% iTFA i.e., exceeding recommended limit of 2% of total fatty acids. A survey of street food in India (Delhi and Haryana) found that 25% of snack foods had levels of TFA more than recommended intake. Commonly consumed deep fried sweets in India (samosa, gulab jamun, jalebi) prepared with vanaspati are reported to contain up to 50% of fat as TFA.

Eradicate by 2022

In India, a national consultation by National Institute of Nutrition on the request of FSSAI was commenced in 2010 and it was decided that limit of trans fatty acids should be not more than 10% by weight notified in 2013. But further amendment to limit trans fatty acid content to not more than 5% was made and now it has been decided to further reduce it to 2% in the near future and completely eradicate by 2022. Existing regulation says that maximum limit of trans fat, should not be more than 5% by

weight in interesterified vegetable fat/oil, bakery and industrial margarine, vanaspati and bakery shortening through (Food Safety and Standards (Food Products and Additives Regulations) Amendment Regulations 2015 in edible fats and oils.

While in the proposed regulation, TFA in all fats and oils to be reduced to < 2% in all fats and oils (excluding ruminant TFA and natural/crude fats/oils e.g., mustard oil (kachchi ghani)/mango kernel fat).