

Experts urge Centre to remove trans-fatty acids by 2021

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E-Paper

Consumer organisations and health experts have written to the Union Health Ministry asking it to advance the 2022 deadline for the elimination of trans-fatty acids in Indian food to 2021. Over 77,000 deaths annually are attributed to trans fats consumption in India.

“This is a major factor for spike in cardiovascular diseases, hypertension and type-II diabetes. An earlier deadline would ensure a drastically reduce the incidence of heart diseases among the Indians,” said Consumer Voice, a Delhi-based voluntary organisation working in the area of consumer education. The group has also written to the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI). As per the draft notifications of FSSAI, the limit of trans-fats in the fats/oils should be not be more than 3% by weight on and from January 1, 2021 and not more than 2% by weight on and from January 1, 2022.

Ashim Sanyal, chief operating officer of Consumer Voice, which works under “Jago Grahak Jago” programme of the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, said trans-fats in Indian food were responsible for health risks like cardiovascular disease, hypertension, type-II diabetes and obesity.

“To safeguard health of consumers, trans-fat should be eliminated from Indian food as soon as possible. The momentum against trans-fats is gaining across the world. Therefore, we are demanding immediate notification by the FSSAI to make Indian food free from trans-fatty acids by 2021,” he said. Globally, as per the Union Health Ministry’s records, trans-fat intake results in more than 500,000 deaths of people from cardiovascular disease every year. In India, more than 77,000 deaths annually are attributed to trans-fats consumption, which is the highest in the world.



Health experts have noted that TFA can be found both naturally and artificially in foods. While natural trans-fats, present in very small amounts in certain animal products and whole milk, are not considered harmful, but industrially-produced artificial trans-fats, which are manufactured by done through adding hydrogen to vegetable oil, lead to an increase in bad cholesterol (LDL) and lowering of good cholesterol (HDL). These trans-fats are largely found in vanaspati oil, margarine, bakery shortenings, and in baked and fried foods.

The organisation has also submitted an eight-point charter of demands to the Health Ministry to draw attention to the issue and take a decision urgently. These include immediate notification of The Food Safety and Standards (Food Product Standards and Additives) Regulations, 2011 with amendment made for trans-fats limits and oils and an earliest notification of Food Safety and Standards Regulations 2019,” the group noted.

Experts have added that the Food Safety and Standards (Food Product and standards and Additives) Regulations, 2011 should include 2% limit on trans-fats for fats, oils and “all food products”. Also, the current regulation of 5% limit should be made measurable with regular surveillance tests while transparency should be ensured in the implementation process by making testing data (5%, 3% and 2% limit) at the national and state levels available in the public domain.

They have also demanded introduction of a new logo for trans-fat-free (2%) products and restriction on misleading “No Trans Fats” claim on packaged food products. “There should also be strict monitoring of marketing methods and advertisements of packaged food items with all kinds of misleading claims,” noted the letter.