

April 2007

Dear Baltimore Restaurant Owner:

I am writing to request that you take steps to make your food healthier by minimizing the amount of trans fats.

Trans fats are unhealthy ingredients responsible for tens of thousands of deaths from heart disease each year. Recently, New York City has made headlines with an effort to sharply reduce trans fat in restaurant foods. A number of Baltimore residents and restaurants have asked questions about this proposal.

This letter aims to answer these questions. It also explains why, as health commissioner, I am asking you to take action on trans fats.

- **What are Trans Fats?**

Trans fats are a type of fat that both elevates LDL (“bad”) cholesterol that causes heart disease and lowers HDL (“good”) cholesterol that works to clear more dangerous than saturated fat, cholesterol, and other similar substances.

Studies have indicated that trans fat is responsible for at least 30,000 premature deaths in the United States per year.

The major source of dietary trans fat is found in partially hydrogenated vegetable oil (PHVO). You can tell if you are using PHVO by reading the ingredients list or the Nutrition Facts label. By simply replacing your use of PHVO in your food establishment with a healthier alternative, you will be assisting your customers in living a healthier life.

Nutrition Facts	
Serving Size 1 oz (28g)	
Amount Per Serving	
Calories 151	Calories from Fat 86
% Daily Value*	
Total Fat 10g	15%
Saturated Fat 1.3g	
Trans Fat 2g	
Cholesterol 0mg	0%
Sodium 168mg	7%
Total Carbohydrate 15g	5%
Dietary Fiber 1g	5%
Sugars 0g	
Protein 2g	
Vitamin A 0%	Vitamin C 15%
Calcium 1%	Iron 3%

*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs.

Sample FDA nutrition facts label

▪ **Where do Trans Fats come from?**

Most trans fats are artificial fats that are created when manufacturers add hydrogen to vegetable oil. This process is called hydrogenation, which is used to increase shelf life and flavor stability of foods. Unlike other fats, the majority of trans fat, about 80%, is formed when food manufacturers convert liquid oils into stiffer and harder fats such as shortening and hard margarine. The remaining 20% is found naturally and in small amounts, primarily in dairy products, some meats and other animal-based foods.

▪ **What kinds of foods contain Trans Fats?**

Manufacturers add trans fats to many types of foods. Some of the most common food products with high levels of trans fats include:

- Some vegetable shortenings
- Some margarines
- Some baked goods such as crackers, cookies, bread, cakes and pies
- Some snack foods such as potato chips, corn chips and popcorn; and
- Foods made with or fried in partially hydrogenated oils, i.e. some donuts, french fries and fried chicken.

▪ **How can I tell whether a food contains Trans Fats?**

Since January 1, 2006, the Food and Drug Administration has required the listing of trans fat on the Nutrition Facts panel on all food labels. The amount of trans fat in a product is listed under saturated fat on the Nutrition Facts panel. Food manufacturers are allowed to list amounts of trans fat with less than 0.5 gram per serving as 0 (zero) on the panel with a footnote stating that the food is “not a significant source of trans fat.” You can also determine whether trans fat is in a product by reviewing the ingredient list. If you find the term “partially hydrogenated vegetable oil,” you can conclude that there is trans fat in that product.

▪ **What is New York doing to reduce trans fats?**

Restaurant food is a major source of trans fat. National surveys show that Americans spend almost half of their food dollars eating out. The FDA found, on average, that Americans consume almost 6 grams of trans fat each day. As stated above, since January 1, 2006, the FDA has required food manufacturers list the trans fat content on all nutrition labels. This requirement, however, does not help the consumer make informed decisions on food they consume in restaurants.

New York City’s initiative is to partially phase-out trans fat in all New York restaurants by allowing



Photograph taken in New York City

restaurants six months to switch to oils, margarines and shortenings that contain less than 0.5 grams of trans fat per serving. After 18 months, other food items would need to contain less than 0.5 grams of trans fat per serving. Packaged food items still in manufacturer's original packaging when served would be exempted.

New York has prepared some great educational materials on trans fats – I am enclosing the copy of one such brochure.

▪ **Who else has reduced Trans Fats?**

The movement to reduce and even ban it has grown momentum over the last couple of years. In 2004, Tiburon, California became the first American trans fat-free city; all 18 restaurant owners in the city are using trans fat-free oil. On December 5, 2005, Kraft Foods, Inc. reformulated many of its products to reduce trans fat content: products such as: Wheat Thin crackers, original Oreo cookies and Kraft Easy Mac. On June 12, 2006, Cheesecake Factory announced that it would be testing a completely trans fat-free food menu. In July 2006, a Chicago councilman proposed an ordinance to the City Council that would ban the use of PHVO. On August 24, 2006, Wendy's publicly announced its move to a new soy-corn oil blend with zero grams of trans fat. And on November 13, 2006, Girl Scouts of America announced that all varieties of Girl Scout cookies will have zero grams of trans fat per serving.

▪ **How will reducing Trans Fats impact the health of customers?**

Dr. Walter Willett, Chair of the Department of Nutrition at the Harvard School of Public Health, said, "If New Yorkers replace all sources of artificial trans fat, by even the most conservative estimates, at least 500 deaths from heart disease would be prevented each year in New York City - more than the number of people killed annually in motor vehicle crashes. Based on long-term studies, the number of preventable deaths may be many times higher. Trans fat from partially hydrogenated vegetable oil is a toxic substance that does not belong in food."

▪ **What are two simple steps to reduce Trans Fats at my food service facility?**

First, check the ingredients of your cooking oils to determine if the words "partially hydrogenated" are listed. If so, Switch your cooking and frying oils to those *without* trans fat.

Second, review the ingredients of your other food products, especially baked goods, to determine if trans fats are present in these products. If trans fat is present in these products, talk to your vendors and request that they provide trans fat free equivalents of these products.

▪ **Will food taste as good without Trans Fats?**

Yes! Switching to a heart-healthy oil will not change the taste of foods and has no significant increase in cost. PHVO is replaceable with healthier alternatives such as traditional mono and poly unsaturated vegetable oil (e.g. canola, corn, olive, etc.) that have not been hydrogenated. Newly developed oils such as soybeans, safflowers and sunflowers are also heart-healthy options.

Trans fat is a real health concern, and we ask that you help protect the health of Baltimore City residents by switching to heart-healthy alternatives this year.

Please feel free to ask your city health inspector about trans fat. You can also contact the Environmental Health Assistant Commissioner, Olivia Farrow with questions.

Her contact information is:

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Baltimore MD 21202
(410) 396- 4422
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In several months, we may ask you to complete a survey about what you have done to minimize the use of trans fats.

Thank you for your assistance in this public health effort.

Sincerely,

Joshua M. Sharfstein, M.D.
Commissioner of Health