

Natural trans fats have health benefits, study shows

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Contrary to popular opinion, not all trans fats are bad for you. University of Alberta researcher Flora Wang found that a diet with enriched levels of trans vaccenic acid (VA) – a natural animal fat found in dairy and beef products – can reduce risk factors associated with heart disease, diabetes and obesity.

Results indicated this benefit was due in part to the ability of VA to reduce the production of chylomicrons – particles of fat and cholesterol that form in the small intestine following a meal and are rapidly processed throughout the body. The role of chylomicrons is increasingly viewed as a critical missing link in the understanding of conditions arising from metabolic disorders.

“Our results provide further evidence of the important role of chylomicrons in contributing to risk factors associated with metabolic disorders,” said Wang, a PhD candidate in the University of Alberta Faculty of Agricultural, Life and Environmental Sciences. “They also indicate a strong opportunity for using diets with enhanced VA to help reduce these risk factors.”

The research involved two VA feeding trials – one short-term (three weeks) and one long-term (16 weeks) – using model rat species for obesity and the metabolic syndrome.

The results, presented recently at the International Symposium on Chylomicrons in Disease, included novel findings that VA may have

direct effects on the intestine. In addition, they showed key metabolic risk factors were reduced. For example, in the long-term trial, total cholesterol was lowered by approximately 30 per cent, LDL cholesterol was lowered by 25 per cent and triglyceride levels were lowered by more than 50 per cent.

Because VA is the major natural trans fat in dairy and beef products, comprising more than 70 per cent of the proportion of natural trans fat content in those products, the findings support a growing body of evidence that indicates natural animal-based trans fat is different than harmful hydrogenated trans fat created through industrial processing, Wang noted.

“As the VA results illustrate, some natural trans fats are not harmful and may in fact be very good for you,” she said.

Source: University of Alberta

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