

Time to reboot thinking on trans fats -- natural trans fats from dairy and beef are good

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Not all trans fats are created equal and it's time for a change in nutrition labels in North America to reflect this, particularly when it comes to dairy and beef products.

According to a scientific review published in the latest edition of *Advances in Nutrition*, natural trans fats produced by ruminant animals such as dairy and [beef cattle](#) are not detrimental to health and in fact show significant positive health effects. Some evidence even links these natural trans fats to reduced [risk of cardiovascular disease](#) and cancer.

"The body of evidence clearly points to a change needed in how [nutrition labels](#) are handled," says Dr. Spencer Proctor, one of the review authors and Director of the Metabolic and Cardiovascular Diseases Laboratory at the University of Alberta in Canada. "Right now, in Canada and U.S. a substantial portion of natural trans fats content is included in the nutrition label trans fats calculation, which is misleading for the consumer. We need a reset in our approach to reflect what the new science is telling us."

Consumers are bombarded on a regular basis about what they should and shouldn't eat. Quite often fat is the primary target of what to avoid and trans fats in particular have a negative reputation. However, the scientific review in *Advances in Nutrition* reveals that consuming natural trans fats produced by ruminant animals has different [health effects](#) than

consuming industrial trans fats, such as partially hydrogenated vegetable oils used in the preparation of some foods such as some baked goods.

As the scientific evidence mounts, there is slowly rising public awareness of this difference. A change in how trans fat information is presented on nutrition labels would be a huge step forward, says Proctor. In some European countries, for example, natural trans fat is not included in the nutrition label calculation. Another approach may be to have separate listings for industrial trans fats and natural trans fats.

By definition, ruminant trans fat is naturally-occurring, found in meat and dairy foods. Industrial produced trans fat is a component of partially hydrogenated vegetable oils, which have been highly associated with cholesterol and coronary heart disease.

According to the review, the naturally occurring trans fat has a different fatty acid profile than industrial trans fat, which contributes to its different physiological effects. Also, the amount of natural trans fat consumed has been relatively stable and much lower than the amounts consumed from partially hydrogenated oils that have been associated with adverse effects.

Researchers evaluated an evidence base from numerous epidemiological and clinical studies in the Advances in [Nutrition](#) review. Based on the promising findings to date, plans for new studies are gaining momentum to further investigate the health implications of natural ruminant-derived trans fats.

For example, one leading scientific program is headed by Proctor, who recently was approved for a \$1 million research grant from the Alberta Livestock and Meat Agency (ALMA) to further this line of study over the next several years. This represents a continuation of strong support for research programs by the livestock industry in Alberta.

"With industry, science, regulators and other important groups in this area working together, we can continue to make strides to help the public better understand the health implications of natural ruminant [trans fats](#)," says Proctor.

More information: The scientific review on natural trans fats in *Advances in Nutrition* is available at [advances.nutrition.org/content ... /4/332.full.pdf+html](#)

Provided by Global Dairy Platform

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