

Trans fats still weighing Americans down

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Good news, bad news: The amount of trans fats we eat has declined over the last 30 years, but we're still consuming more than recommended.

In a study reported in the *Journal of the American Heart Association*, researchers reviewed results from a series of six surveys as part of the Minnesota Heart Survey in 1980-2009.

More than 12,000 adults 25-74 years old in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area revealed that:

- Trans fat intake dropped by about one-third in men (32 percent) and women (35 percent).
- Average intake of the [omega-3 fatty acids](#) (DHA and EPA) was steady, but current intake is still very low.
- Intake of saturated fats dropped, but still account for about 11.4 percent of daily calories for men and women. The American Heart Association recommends limiting [saturated fat](#) to 5-6 percent of total calories.

"There's a downward trend in trans and saturated fat intake levels, but it's clear that we still have room for improvement," said Mary Ann Honors, Ph.D., lead study author and an epidemiology researcher at the University of Minnesota School of Public Health in Minneapolis.

Saturated fats and [trans fats](#) can increase the risk of heart disease because they can raise bad cholesterol levels and lower good cholesterol

levels. Saturated fats are found in products derived from animals, such as meat and full-fat dairy products, as well as some tropical oils such as coconut or palm oil. Trans fats are mainly found in processed, fried and commercially baked foods such as pastries, pizza, pies, cookies and crackers.

The study found that men consumed about 1.9 percent of their daily calories from trans fats and women about 1.7 percent. The American Heart Association recommends limiting trans fats to no more than 1 percent of total calories consumed.

"To make your diet more in line with the recommendations, use the nutritional panel on food labels to choose foods with little or no trans fats," Honors said.

Researchers also analyzed the participants' intake of omega-3 [fatty acids](#), which has not changed significantly in the last thirty years. Omega-3 fatty acids may improve cardiovascular disease risk by lowering risk of abnormal heartbeat, cutting triglyceride levels and improving blood pressure.

The American Heart Association recommends that people without documented coronary heart disease (CHD) eat a variety of fish at least twice a week, with an emphasis on fatty fish such as salmon, mackerel and herring, which are rich in omega-3 fatty acids. The recommendations differ slightly for patients with documented CHD or those who may need to lower their triglycerides.

Provided by American Heart Association

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