

Policymakers call for action on industrially produced trans fatty acids in foods in the European Union

April 14 2015

The impact of industrially produced trans fatty acids (TFAs) on the health of citizens in the European Union (EU) will be debated today by Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), representatives of the European Commission and WHO Europe.

The panel debate, which takes place in the European Parliament, Brussels is an initiative of the Members of the European Parliament (MEP) Heart Group, with the support of the European Society of Cardiology (ESC) and of the European Heart Network (EHN).

Industrially produced TFAs are widely recognised as the most harmful type of dietary fat with detrimental effects on [health](#). In particular, TFAs significantly increase the risk of coronary heart disease (CHD). It may also increase risk of other chronic diseases.

These fats are produced by adding hydrogen to vegetable oil and are used as ingredients in some processed foods, including biscuits and ready meals.

To date, only three EU Member States - Austria, Denmark and Hungary - have adopted legislation to restrict industrially produced TFAs in the food chain. It is estimated that thousands of lives and billions of euros could be saved if these measures were introduced more widely.

In 2008, the European Parliament published a study recommending that a ban on industrially produced TFAs should be considered at EU level. In 2009, the World Health Organization (WHO) concluded that the information available was sufficient to recommend reducing significantly or virtually eliminating industrially produced TFAs from the food supply. In December 2014 the European Commission was expected to present a report on the presence of trans fats in foods and in overall diet in the EU population.

Commenting on the importance of addressing TFA intake with legislative measures, Ms Mairead McGuinness MEP and Ms Karin Kadenbach MEP, Co-Chairs of the MEP Heart Group, said: "Cardiovascular disease is the number one killer in Europe, causing 1.9 million deaths every year.. Today, we call upon the European Commission to bring forward a proposal for an EU-wide regulation to address this important health issue."

Expressing WHO's support for the initiative, Dr Roberto Bertollini, Director of WHO Brussels and Chief scientist of WHO Europe, said: "We encourage the EU to introduce a regulation mandating an upper limit of industrially produced [trans fatty acids](#) in food. TFAs are not safe for use and are associated to a number of negative health consequences which could and should be prevented by better regulation."

Experiences from Denmark and New York show that TFAs can be replaced with healthier substitutes without increasing the cost or reducing the quality of foods.

Prof Steen Stender, keynote speaker from the University of Copenhagen, adds "Since the mid-1970s, average intake of TFAs in Europe has dropped considerably. However, average intake masks differences in consumption levels between different countries and social groups. Notably, people from economically disadvantaged groups are

likely to consume more TFAs by way of diet consisting of more processed foods. It is important that we act now."

Any reduction in cardiovascular diseases will result in major health gains and reductions in health inequalities. Without a regulatory intervention, inequalities in cardiovascular mortality, linked to TFAs intake, could increase in the EU. Inequalities in mortality from cardiovascular diseases account for almost half of the excess mortality in lower socio-economic groups in most European countries.

More information: "Health effects of trans-fatty acids: experimental and observational evidence." *Eur J Clin Nutr* (2009) 63, S5–S21

"WHO Scientific Update on trans fatty acids: summary and conclusions." *European Journal of Clinical Nutrition* (2009) 63, S68–S75

Provided by European Society of Cardiology

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