

**Beth Greer:
SuperNatural Mom**

Treacherous Trans Fats -- the World’s Unhealthiest Food

Trans fats are lurking everywhere and chances are you’re consuming them in your diet even without knowing it. Many, possibly most restaurants -- even upscale ones right here in Marin -- cook their food in partially hydrogenated oil. Why should you care? When manufacturers add hydrogen to vegetable oil (a process called hydrogenation) it creates artery-clogging trans fats. The National Academy of Sciences has stated that trans fats raise bad cholesterol, and lower good cholesterol -- no other food does that. Studies have shown that they can lead to a major increase in cancer, arthritis, fatigue and many chronic illnesses.

You probably may have guessed that trans fats are used in fast-food restaurants like Burger King, Wendy’s, Krispy Kreme and McDonald’s -- which still uses trans fatty oil, even after they had promised to switch to an oil with less trans fat by 2003. But you may not be aware that trans fats are also being used in the takeout food you order from grocery delis and they’re hidden in many processed and packaged foods and snacks, including: salad dressings, French fries, mayonnaise, most packaged foods like chips, pretzels, candies (Tootsie Rolls and Snickers), spreads and prepared meals. They’re even in fresh-baked supermarket muffins, breads, tortillas and cookies.

Speaking of cookies, what’s up with the Girl Scouts? While it may be a wonderful organization, they still bake their cookies with partially hydrogenated vegetable oil. Lots of us are eating them -- Girl Scouts sold almost half a billion dollars in cookies last year! You might be thinking that you and your kids only eat one or two cookies at a time, so how bad could that be? Well, based on a Harvard nurses’ study, just one gram of trans fat is likely to increase your risk of heart disease by 20 per cent if consumed on a regular daily basis.

"Trans fats are bad fats," stated Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson at a news conference in 2003. "The less trans fat you and I eat, the healthier we will be." Beginning January 2006, the law now says that all packaged foods are required to list the trans fat content on their Nutrition Facts labels -- but, there’s an inaccuracy in this label information. The FDA says that any food that contains less than 0.5 grams of trans fat per serving "shall be expressed as zero." That means that if you eat one serving each of cookies, chips and pretzels all containing 0.4 grams per serving -- you have just consumed 1.2 grams of trans fat, despite the fact that each of the labels claim that the products contain 0 grams of trans fat per serving!

As we become aware of this unhealthy fat in our food we can influence the manufacturers as well as the restaurants who cook with it. Stephen Joseph, Marin resident and founder of BanTransFats.com, sued Kraft/Nabisco in May 2003 to ban the marketing and sale of trans fat-laden Oreos to children, and to prevent Kraft from continuing to distribute Oreos to young kids in schools. As a result of the lawsuit, Kraft agreed to remove partially hydrogenated oil from Oreos. Two months later, Kraft said that it would reduce or eliminate trans fat in all its cookies and crackers. Kraft also agreed to stop all in-school marketing.

Mr. Joseph also created " Project Tiburon" where he convinced restaurant owners and managers in Tiburon to use trans fat-free cooking oil for frying. Tiburon is now America’s first trans-fat free city. New York City has announced a similar program, in part inspired by Project Tiburon.

What can consumers do? At restaurants, bakeries and other places where you buy food with no labels, ask what kind of oil or fat they use. If they say they use "vegetable oil," ask whether it is partially hydrogenated vegetable oil. Don't be shy. When you ask, you are sending a message to the seller of the food that you don't want to eat trans fats.

Become a careful label reader – especially focusing on the ingredient list. If it says "partially hydrogenated" or "shortening" don't eat it. Of all processed foods, frozen apple pie, donuts, crackers, and cookies top the list for trans fats, according to Consumer Reports. If you can't remember the last time you made a meal from scratch, try preparing some non-processed food at home from time to time. Use butter and olive oil (even coconut oil) in place of margarine --which is high in trans fats. They taste better, and appear to be better for you. Choose natural foods -- ones with ingredient lists you can understand... or better yet, eat whole foods and snacks like organic raisins, raw nuts, and fresh fruit, with no ingredient list at all.

Getting your kids to eat healthy can be a challenge and we parents have to serve as good role models. Nutritious, well-planned snacks are a vital part of your child's diet so begin to think of kids' snack time as a planned mini meal and not a spur of the moment indulgence. Don't be swayed by advertising. Many prepared foods that are marketed as "kid-friendly" are poor in nutrition. For example, Oscar Mayer's Lunchables that come with a treat and a drink get two-thirds of their calories from unhealthy fat and sugar.

Try thinking out of the box...literally. My 8-year-old daughter now enjoys eating Nori or seaweed strips that I buy at the Asian Market. She thinks they're green potato chips. I don't correct her.

Beth Greer has helped thousands of people see possibilities and feel empowered to make changes in their lives through her role as former President of The Learning Annex, a nationally renowned alternative adult education school. She has lived through the process of discovering a tumor, then successfully shrinking it away without drugs or surgery, using alternative methods of healing. She lives in Mill Valley with her husband and 8-year-old daughter. If you have any questions or comments you can contact her at supernaturalmom2@aol.com.