

NO! in Honeyrose!!



# The menace of trans-fats

Some of our favourite snacks are still laced with deadly fats that are now banned in two European countries. So why are we still eating them? By **Andrew**

They are the cosy, friendly foods that present us with a rosy image of our childhoods: Quality Street chocolates and Angel Delight dessert; Horlicks instant night-time drink and Knorr stock cubes.

As brands, they endure. Not quite as cutting edge as their more sophisticated and modern supermarket-shelf counterparts, perhaps. And certainly not as healthy. Because the truth is that some of the leading comfort foods we remember from our youth are doing their very best to kill us.

The culprit is one item, usually tucked away in tiny lettering on the ingredients label. It's called hydrogenated vegetable oil. It sounds harmless enough, but it is one of the most dangerous products ever to be mashed into the food we eat.

Food scares are, of course, nothing new, but hydrogenated vegetable oil (HVO) elevates health risk to a whole new level. Recent scientific research suggests that it may be responsible for an unknown, but certainly very large, number of heart attacks.

Clinical researchers have discovered that ingesting just two grams a day of HVO - the

amount contained in just one doughnut fried in this type of fat - increases an individual's risk of heart disease by 23 per cent. This makes HVO much more dangerous to health than the saturated fats such as butter it often replaces. It distorts cholesterol levels, encourages obesity, causes inflammatory conditions, and can even be a cause of infertility.

Yet, despite the dangers, many major UK food producers continue to use it in everyday products. Brands that include it in their manufacture include Cadbury Heroes, some Nestlé and Mars confectionery, Batchelors Cup a Soups and even Haliborange Omega-3 Fish Oil capsules for children.

Nor is its use confined to retail food goods. Hydrogenated vegetable oil, or trans-fat, as it is sometimes called, is also widely used in bakery products, and by restaurants and takeaways, where it usually does not have to be labelled and declared as being present.

Given the risks, why do some of the country's leading food companies continue to lace their brands with this deadly ingredient?

The answer is predictably simple: cost and convenience.

Trans-fats were discovered back in 1903, when oil was boiled to more than 260C in the presence of a metal catalyst such as nickel. The result was that its molecular structure mutated, turning the oil into a hard, greasy, grey lard-like substance looking as one observer described it, like "the skin of a corpse".

The original purpose in making it was to create a cheap form of candle wax as an alternative to the more expensive tallow. That this wax could also be used in mass food production was a commercially sensational secondary discovery.

"Hydrogenated vegetable oil may look and sound disgusting, but in many ways, it's a food scientist's holy grail," explains the health writer and author Maggie Stanfield, whose recently published book, *Trans-Fat: The Time Bomb in Your Food* tells the full story of its acceptance by the food industry.

"It can be used as an alternative to butter - it's a lot cheaper, is taste-free, gives what the industry calls 'good consumer mouth feel', and lasts a long time. A very long time.

An American TV programme recently featured a fairy cake made more than 25 years ago. It still looks perfect."

These days, far less harmful substitutes



**Muffin  
7g**

are readily available, and some UK food producers now take advantage of them. Others, though, persist in their use. And why shouldn't they? Trans-fats keep production costs down, and most consumers remain unaware of their dangers, believing, wrongly, that the real peril to their health lies in saturated fats such as palm oil and butter, which are actually far less harmful.

Given the weight of scientific evidence that has now built up against trans-fats, there is an overwhelming case for the Government to ban their use. This has already happened in Denmark, where legislation removing HVO from the food chain was introduced five years ago. Since then, the rate of heart disease among Danes has dropped by a staggering 40 per cent. The only European country to follow suit since then is Switzerland, which introduced a ban this April. Britain has no plans to take action, instead being content to leave the industry to get its own house in order.

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*Trans-Fat: The Time Bomb in Your Food* by Maggie Stanfield. Souvenir Press, £4.99



**Doughnut  
3.2g**