

New, Stricter Rules Limiting Trans Fat in Food Will Be Rolled Out Next Year: Centre

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The Indian government is likely to roll out new regulations to limit trans fatty acids (TFA) by this month, according to a report from The Print. This comes at the heels of the Union Minister of Health Harsh Vardhan stating the Centre is on its way to make India “[trans-fat free](#)” by 2022. India implemented a rule that would limit the percentage of trans fats in foods to [5% in 2017](#). With new regulations, India intends to drop this number to 3% in 2021 and later 2% in 2022.

“Trans fat is a modifiable risk factor for cardiovascular diseases (CVD),” Vardhan [says](#), “Eliminating CVD risk factor is especially relevant during Covid-19 as people with CVD are predisposed to have serious conditions having an impact on mortality.”

The trans-fat ban both benefits citizens’ health and saves countries exorbitant amounts in [healthcare costs](#). But it also presents a potentially ethically fraught question about how much a government can regulate people’s food habits under the guise of ensuring citizens’ health and safety.

Trans fats occur naturally in milk and meat products. They’re artificially generated in fried and baked food items like cakes, pizza, or samosas during hydrogenation, an industrial process that uses hydrogen to solidify vegetable oils. This makes food taste better, last longer, and even stay [affordable](#). But, trans fats are also [linked to](#) high cholesterol, diabetes, heart disease, and stroke.

There are clear, tangible benefits to the heavy regulation of trans fats. People have a [hard time changing](#) their own unhealthy lifestyle habits – especially food habits. In comparison, [research](#) has found that policy interventions in Denmark — the first country to regulate trans fats — led to a substantial decrease in cardiovascular disease-related mortality. The trans fats ban in [New York, U.S.](#), led to a six percent decrease in heart attacks and strokes. Mindful of such clear benefits, countries like the U.S. and Canada banned trans fats in 2018. The World Health Organization urged countries around the world to do away with trans fats by 2023. Considering that India’s cardiovascular disease burden is [above average](#), with one in four citizens linked to heart disease, the regulation sounds sensible.

On the other hand, food improves an individual’s quality of life and has immense social, religious, and cultural value. This is why bioethicists counter that bans must be the last resort in comparison to other education and awareness-based policy interventions like education, awareness drives, food labeling, and quality standards set in place to inform customers about the dangers of consuming excess trans-fats. Bioethicist David

Resnick [writes](#), “If it turns out that other methods of decreasing the consumption of trans fats are as effective as bans, then trans fats bans do not meet the least infringement condition [for proposed policies that restrict human freedom for public health] as well.”

In India, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) launched [awareness drives](#) on trans fats in 2018. Then, In 2019, they released a new draft regulation that will require food packaging to display the nutrition values of added sugar, sodium, saturated fats, and trans-fats — with high values highlighted in [bright red](#) for consumers. The FSSAI also states that food businesses can voluntarily state they are ‘[trans-fat free](#).’ But there’s no clarity on when this draft regulation will be approved by the Government, while further reductions to trans-fat percentages in foods might occur by the end of this month.

As of now, there’s no clear idea of whether stricter regulations will work in India, but the FSSAI is optimistic. “Reducing trans fats from food items is not an impossible task. We have internally estimated that even in products that are assumed to be unhealthy, such as jalebi and samosa, some producers have managed to keep the trans fat levels within two to four percent. Even some reputed chocolate brands are trans-fats-free. This means a tweak in manufacturing processes, accompanied by innovation can lead to a reduction in these levels,” Arun Singhal, CEO of the FSSAI told [The Print](#), adding that the government will support industries making the change with sufficient time and educational resource