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The Dangers of Trans-Fatty Acids and Heart Problems

Recent press articles have reported that fat is closely tied to heart problems and is unsafe at virtually any level. Scientists argue that a strong link exists between what are called "trans-fats" and increased levels of LDL, the so-called "bad" cholesterol. Trans-fats develop during food preparation when liquid oils convert into semi-solids - and this happens not just in the fast food industry. Dairy products and beef, for instance, are also said to produce trans-fats naturally.

In light of numerous scientific studies on trans-fats and the adverse effects of high LDL levels in the body, the FDA has recently decided that it will require the declaration of trans fat content on food labels. However, no recommended daily limits will be identified due to lack of consensus within the research community and the FDA on what limits are acceptable. Essentially a zero consumption limit would be desirable but we know that this is a tall order considering the array of pastries, pizzas, french fries, cookies and other items on Americans' daily menu.

Selected Supplementation

Fred A. Kummerow, Professor Emeritus of Food Chemistry at the University of Illinois asks what we should do to lessen our dependence on trans fatty acids and the risk it brings over time. He suggests we eat more foods rich in magnesium, B6 and B12. However, Kummerow says: "People can't easily lower their trans fatty acids intake, because they can't tell how much they are getting by looking at labels....Some products in Canada list percentages voluntarily, but U.S. food-makers do not, nor are they required to do so by the Food and Drug Administration."

Soy, as a plant food, is low in saturated fat, the "bad fat". Consumption of soy, especially in Asian countries where it is popular, has been associated with a significant range of health benefits, especially in retaining normal cholesterol levels and maintaining heart health. It appears that diets that include moderate amounts of soy foods can be extremely advantageous. Soy isoflavones are also said to alleviate some common symptoms associated with menopause.

Conjugated Linoleic Acid and Omega 3 fatty acids (the good guys) - These fats can help hasten the reduction of body fat. It is a necessary substance for the transport of dietary fats into cells where it can be used to build muscle or produce energy. Body fat is believed that it is reduced through a combination of reduced energy intake, increased metabolic rate, and increased use of fats for energy--all of which contributes to promoting cardiovascular health.