

## **New York bans trans fats**

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NEW YORK -- New York on Tuesday became the first city in the nation to ban artery-clogging artificial trans fats at restaurants, leading the charge to limit consumption of an ingredient linked to heart disease and used in everything from french fries to pizza dough to pancake mix.

In a city where eating out is a major form of activity -- either for fun or out of hectic necessity -- many New Yorkers were all for the ban, saying health concerns were more important than fears of Big Brother supervising their stomachs.

"I don't care about what might be politically correct and what's not," said Murray Bader, nursing a cup of coffee at Dunkin' Donuts on Tuesday morning. "I want to live longer!"

The 72-year-old Manhattan resident called the ban a "wake-up call" for a public often unaware of the risks of artificial fats. "This stuff clogs up your vessels," he said. "When it comes to health, we only have one life."

Toni Lewis, catching a quick dinner at McDonald's before her daughter's piano lesson on the eve of the vote, acknowledged that yes, it might be an intrusion for the city to tell people what they can and can't put into their stomachs. But, she added, it was a welcome one.

"This is New York," she said. "People eat out a lot. We don't have a choice. We need someone to make it a healthier proposition."

Health and nutrition groups say artificial trans fats clearly contribute to heart disease. Studies have shown they raise bad cholesterol and lower the good kind. Partially hydrogenated vegetable oil, the main form of artificial trans fats, is used for frying and baking and turns up in a host of processed foods: cookies, pizza dough, crackers and pre-made blends like pancake mix.

"It's basically a slow form of poison," said David Katz, director of the Yale Prevention Research Center. "I applaud New York City, and frankly, I think there should be a nationwide ban."

Not everyone agrees with Katz -- he's gotten angry e-mails calling him and colleagues the "food police" and saying, "If I want to eat trans fats, that's my inalienable right." To which he responds: "Would you want the burden of

asking your restaurant whether there's lead in the food? Whether there's arsenic in the bread? For all I know, maybe arsenic makes bread more crusty. But it's poison."

Some industry representatives were not happy. E. Charles Hunt, executive vice president of the New York State Restaurant Association, said the city had overstepped its authority by ordering restaurants to abandon an ingredient permitted by the FDA.

"This is a legal product," he said. "They're headed down a slippery slope here."

The Board of Health, which passed the ban unanimously, did give restaurants a minor break by relaxing the proposed deadline. Restaurants will now be barred from using most frying oils containing the fats by July 2007 and will have another year to eliminate them from all foods.

The ban, which was advocated by health-conscious Mayor Michael Bloomberg, follows a national requirement beginning this past January that companies list artificial trans-fat content on food labels. Efforts are also being made to reduce the trans-fat content of snacks in school vending machines.

It's the danger a bad diet poses to children that has experts the most worried. It's also what worries Kathy Ramirez, a 26-year-old New York mother who takes her toddler to McDonald's every week. She approves of the ban and a related measure passed Tuesday, requiring restaurants that already disclose calorie counts -- mostly chain restaurants -- to post them right on the menu.

"It's hurting us, all this fat, but the kids really like it," said Ramirez, pointing to 3-year-old Amber, who'd just finished her dinner. "It would be better to know what we're getting."

(McDonald's Corp. has been experimenting with healthier oil blends but has not committed to a full switch yet, though it has said it will be ready for a New York City ban. Wendy's International Inc. introduced a zero-trans fat oil in August, and Yum Brands Inc.'s KFC and Taco Bell said they also will cut trans fats from their kitchens.)

At Le Perigord, a tony, sedate French restaurant favored by diplomats from the nearby United Nations, owner Georges Briguet is a big fan of the trans-fats ban, and even says he'd consider putting calorie counts on his own upscale menu -- though it's only chains with standardized items that would be affected.

"In this country there are so many obese people -- it really is a disgrace," Briguet said. "It's important for the health of the population to ban these artificial fats. When I was growing up in France, my mother never even gave me a french fry. We don't have a fryer here. We just saute our potatoes in some good butter."

The mayor, Briguet added, "is just as responsible for the health of someone eating the wrong food as for someone who kills himself smoking." Bloomberg banned smoking in New York's bars and restaurants during his first term.

The public acceptance of that smoking ban, which at the time was a major source of worry to restaurant owners, shows why food chains should embrace the current New York ban, said Tim Zagat, founder of the popular Zagat Survey.

"You can't put lead in your food, right? With trans fats, you're not going to die as fast, but they are clearly bad for you and people don't even know when they're eating them," Zagat said.

"If I were a restaurant, I would comply as quickly as I possibly could," he said. "Some fast-food chains are in the middle of the railroad track right now. They'd better rethink their business models. This is the next big issue in the United States."

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