



Trans fatty acids in foods – bio-familia statement dated 07.05.2007

Trans fatty acids have been criticised recently in the media, among the scientific community and in industry, because they could constitute a health risk to the public. The catalyst for this in Switzerland was a study carried out in 2006/2007 by ETH Zurich, which found that around 30% of the 120 foods examined had a trans fatty acid content higher than the 2% limit set by Denmark. Internationally there are still no limits for trans fatty acids, although some countries, such as the USA, operate on the basis of a duty of declaration. Up until now the trans fatty acid content of foods has only been a statutory requirement for infant foods (starter foods and follow-on foods).

Discussions between the Swiss Federal Office of Public Health (BAG), a team of experts from ETH and representatives from industry led to an agreement to aim to resolve the trans fatty acid problem in Switzerland by the end of 2008. It is not yet clear whether this objective will be achieved by voluntary measures within the industry or whether a specific limit will have to be set. The manufacturers are aiming to reduce the trans fatty acid content without this raising the saturated fatty acid content of the products. However, it is worth considering that, across Europe, the total consumption of trans fatty acids is 10 times less than that of saturated fatty acids, and these continue to pose the greater problem.

Trans fatty acids – an assessment

Although they are unsaturated fats, trans fatty acids are judged to be poor from a nutritional point of view as they have a negative effect on the blood lipids and thus increase the risk of arteriosclerosis (hardening of the arteries).

Trans fatty acids are produced by the partial hardening of plant oils and the heating of oils, fats and foods which contain unsaturated fatty acids. Trans fatty acids are also present in animal fats, such as milk and butter. These animal fatty acids (primarily vaccenic acid), and the conjugated linoleic acids produced from them, should not have the same negative effects.

Position of bio-familia AG and measures already taken

The ETH Zurich study did not criticise breakfast cereals with a trans fatty acid content of < 0.4%. Based on our own calculations and, after having analysed our own products, we can confirm these results for our own range and guarantee **that our muesli contains < 0.4% trans fatty acids and is therefore classified as harmless to human health**. We achieve this by using high-grade oils and also do not use partially-hardened fats. When sourcing new raw materials, we have set ourselves the objective of ensuring that they are free from trans fatty acids and that their saturated fatty acid content is below the recommended level for a healthy diet.

Basic principles for a balanced, healthy diet

In this whole discussion, we should bear in mind the principles for a healthy, balanced diet, particularly in relation to fat consumption:

- the total fat consumption should be a maximum of 30% of the energy requirement (approx. 35-40% today)
- within this 30%, the percentage of saturated fatty acids should be no more than 10%
- further improvements can be achieved by looking at the ratio of Omega-6 to Omega-3 fatty acids, the percentage of polyunsaturated fatty acids (PUFAs) and by reducing the quantity of trans fatty acids
- as a general rule, fried foods, bakery products with a high percentage of fat and full-fat milk products, as well as meat with a high fat content, should only be eaten in moderation.

bio-familia AG

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