

**Fa(c)ts of life**

Last December, New York became the first US city to ban trans fat from its restaurants. Mixed reactions prompted big food chains like KFC, McDonald's and Wendy's to switch to healthier cooking mediums. This ban was preceded by a embargo on trans fat in Denmark in 2004.



# Trans fats are in the fire

The fight against trans fats, the deadly cooking medium, is made harder by fast food outlets and street vendors who use it to make their greasy fare tastier. Labonita Ghosh reports

That burger or samosa you eat could kill you. It contains an item that urban India is only now beginning to learn about: trans fatty acids, or trans fat. The Union Health Ministry is pushing for processed food manufacturers to list the trans fat content on nutrition labels, along with other ingredients, but nutritionists say this will not help.

The biggest "trans-gressor" in Mumbai's battle against the fat comes from the large, unregulated market of street and fast food that the city is addicted to.

Trans fats are generated when liquid oils are turned into solid or semi-solid fats through hydrogenation, a process by which hydrogen is added to vegetable oil. This happens when oil is recycled during cooking, or when food is heated over and over again in the same oil it was cooked in.



Watch that vada pav: Actress Sonali Kulkarni digs into one at a food outlet

them tastier: the crispiness of a samosa or biscuit, or the fluffiness of a pastry made with shortening (butter, fat or lard used while baking). The bad news is that it can be deadly for your health.

"A high intake of trans fats increases the

diseases, particularly a clogging of the arteries."

An Indian Council of Medical Research study says the amount of trans and saturated fat in a healthy person should never exceed 7 per cent of total calories consumed in a day; for people who are

metro  
matters



**Medium killer**

■ These are some of the street-side snacks and fast-food items that typically contain a high amount of trans fat: Samosas, batata vadas, burgers, pizza, gulab jamuns, chivda, cookies, pastries, parathas and puris.

■ A high consumption of trans fat can lead to: coronary heart diseases, obesity, diabetes and hypertension.

"On an average, we consume about 3 per cent of trans fats every day," says Dr Nupur Krishnan, a nutritionist with the Asian Heart Institute and Research Centre. "But this count shoots past the permissible level when you have a trans fat-loaded samosa or *batata vada*."

In India, vanaspati generates the highest amount of trans fats. "But it's

chemistry department, National Institute of Nutrition (NIN), Hyderabad. "There are over 500 vanaspati manufacturers in the country who would immediately block any government-enforced ban."

Some places have, however, been able to do this. In December 2006, New York banned trans fats. Denmark has found substitutes through an arguably expensive process called "interesterification", using enzymes to neutralise trans fats.

Nutritionists recommend "safer" oils — olive, sunflower, mustard, soy, sesame seed and coconut — and shallow-fried food in general. "One could keep a little bit of various kinds of oil at home for different uses," says Subbulakshmi. "It's okay for a person to consume about three-four teaspoons of any kind of oil per day."

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in the US first issued a regulation asking manufacturers to list trans fat content on labels in 2003, and gave them till January 2006 to put this in place. In India, the Prevention of Food Adulteration Act makes it mandatory for food manufacturers to put down the ingredients in a nutrition panel. But it would be a while before trans fats can be included too.

"The US has been talking about trans fats all these years, but even today it hasn't been able to ban it," says NIN director B Sesikeran. "It's a mat-