

FSSAI slashes limit for trans fat levels in foods

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

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As per the World Health Organisation, approximately 5.4 lakh deaths take place each year globally because of intake of trans fatty acids.

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has capped the amount of trans fatty acids (TFA) in oils and fats to 3% for 2021 and 2% by 2022 from the current permissible limit of 5% through an amendment to the Food Safety and Standards (Prohibition and Restriction on Sales) Regulations.

The country's food regulatory body notified the amendment on December 29, more than a year after it issued a draft on the subject for consultation with stakeholders. The revised regulation applies to edible refined oils, vanaspati (partially hydrogenated oils), margarine, bakery shortenings, and other mediums of cooking such as vegetable fat spreads and mixed fat spreads. Trans fats are associated with increased risk of heart attacks and death from coronary heart disease. As per the World Health Organisation (WHO), approximately 5.4 lakh deaths take place each year globally because of intake of industrially produced trans fatty acids. The WHO has also called for global elimination of trans fats by 2023. "The FSSAI rule comes at the time of a pandemic where the burden of non-communicable diseases has risen. Cardiovascular diseases along with diabetes are proving fatal for COVID-19 patients," says Ashim Sanyal, Chief Operating Officer of Consumer VOICE, adding that the regulation must not be restricted to oils and fats, but must apply to all foods. "Hopefully, FSSAI will address this as well before January 2022 to eliminate chemical trans fatty acids from the Indian platter." While the regulation comes into effect immediately, industry players were made to take a pledge back in 2018 that they would comply with WHO's call for action to reduce TFA by 3% by 2021 allowing them three years to comply with the latest regulation.

It was in 2011 that India first passed a regulation that set a TFA limit of 10% in oils and fats, which was further reduced to 5% in 2015.