

# Trans fat can harm Black Americans

By Gail C. Christopher  
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A new line has appeared on nutritional labels of packaged foods, and paying attention to it could save and extend the lives of African-Americans.

Since January, a federal regulation has required the labels to disclose how much "trans fat" the food contains, along with the amounts of cholesterol, sodium, sugar, protein and other nutrients. Food makers add hydrogen to ordinary fat to make trans fat, which gives their products a longer shelf life.

The process also makes the fat harder, and trans fat is, as a result, harder on your heart and arteries, as bad as ordinary fat is in the first place.

## Smokers

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In contrast, Ahluwalia notes that African-Americans experience a disproportionate share of tobacco-related illnesses, including higher rates of death.

African-Americans tend to smoke mentholated cigarettes and higher tar and nicotine cigarettes. They also have a slower rate of nicotine metabolism; higher levels, per cigarette smoked, of cotinine, a compound present in those exposed to tobacco; and greater difficulty quitting smoking compared to other ethnic groups, which may be contributing factors to the higher smoking-related illness and death rates.

The 26-week study focused on the effects of nicotine gum and counseling among African-American light smokers. The study included 755 African-American light smokers. The average age of study participants was 45, and 66 percent were women.

The study found that quit rates for participants who were given prescription nicotine gum were no better than for participants given a placebo gum. However, participants who received specific health education had double the quit rate over participants who received motivational counseling.

Ahluwalia and his colleagues randomly assigned the participants to one of four study groups: nicotine gum plus advice-oriented health education, nicotine gum plus motivational counseling, placebo gum plus health education, and placebo plus motivational counseling. When enrolled into the study, participants who smoked an average of seven cigarettes a day had cotinine levels approaching White smokers who smoke 20 cigarettes a day.

Participants prescribed gum received an eight-week supply of either nicotine or placebo gum and six counseling sessions during the 26 weeks of the study. A booklet specifically developed for African-American light smokers was given to all participants but used extensively for groups receiving health education.

During the course of the study, biochemical measures were randomly taken to check for tobacco-related compounds, which, if present, indicated an individual was using tobacco products.

Quit rates for participants using nicotine gum were 14.2 percent compared to 11.1 percent for the placebo group. Participants receiving health education had a quit rate of 16.7 percent compared to 8.5 percent for other participants.

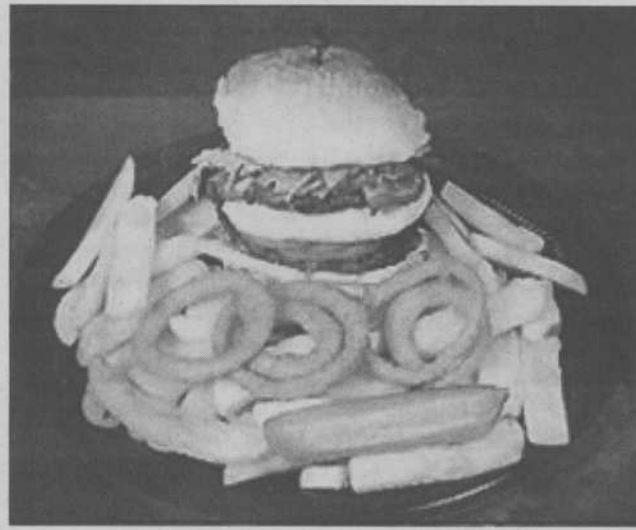
This study was funded with a grant from the National Cancer Institute. GlaxoSmithKline provided the nicotine gum but played no role in the design of the study, its conduct or interpretation of the results.

The University of Minnesota Cancer Center is part of the Academic Health Center and is designated by the National Cancer Institute as a comprehensive cancer center. Its more than 500 members conduct basic, clinical and population research; provide treatment to cancer patients and present education programs.

Scientists now agree that consuming trans fat, saturated fat and cholesterol increases the risk of coronary heart disease, the leading cause of death in America. African-Americans have the highest mortality rate from heart disease of any ethnic group in the country and are 29 percent more likely to die from it than non-Hispanic Whites over their lifetimes.

Many processed foods contain trans fat: shortening, deep-fried and commercially baked items, salad dressings, potato chips, candies, cookies and other snacks. Margarine that has been hardened into sticks is another source.

Shoppers may find some foods on grocery shelves without the label, if they were produced before the



regulation's effective date on January 1, 2006. Look for the words "partially hydrogenated vegetable shortening," "partially hydrogenated vegetable oil," "shortening" or "margarine" near the top of the list of ingredients. If those substances are near the top of the ingredient list, then the product contains a significant or high amount of trans fats.

All of these products are to be avoided, though the Food and Drug Administra-

tion, which issued the new regulation, advises that trying to eliminate trans fat is unrealistic because it is also found in dairy products and meats. Scientists have not calculated how much of this kind of fat is safe to eat on a daily basis, so the best thing to do is to consume as little of it as possible.

The amount of trans fat is listed in grams right under the line for saturated fat. This new information marks the

first such change since the Nutrition Facts label was introduced in 1993.

It has been proven that trans fats increase the level of bad cholesterol, which hardens the arteries and causes heart disease. These fats also reduce good cholesterol in the body and its beneficial effects. African-Americans, particularly men, have higher levels of bad cholesterol than Whites.

The health consequences become apparent by middle age. Between the ages of 45 and 64, African-American men have a 70 percent higher risk for heart failure than White men. For African-American women between the ages of 45 and 54, their risk is 50 percent greater than White women's.

The change in food labels could lead to significant progress in reducing health disparities, that is if Black shoppers read them and make better choices. It remains to be seen how many food mak-

ers will eliminate trans fats on their own, as the producer of one popular brand of potato and corn chips did in 2003, when the federal government announced plans for the new labels. The front of that brand's packages declare the chips contain "0 percent trans fat," though they remain high in salt and low in nutritional value.

Still, more needs to be done to make healthy food choices more available in low-income communities, where supermarkets with fresh produce sections have gone missing. Fatty foods must also be reduced in school cafeteria menus. Listing trans fat on food labels is a step toward helping African-Americans live longer, healthier lives. But it is only one step.

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## Your Horoscope Says... July 6-July 12

### ARIES

After last week's energy, you might want to play things a bit more low-key this week. You'll do yourself a favor if you stick close to home and relax. Your energy could use a little refreshment. Meditation, listening to music, even doing some household chores, will recharge your batteries.

Soul Affirmation: Before goodness can come, I must expect goodness.

Lucky Numbers: 12, 32, 51

### TAURUS

A quiet week will work wonders for you. Make an effort to slow your pace, both physically and mentally this week. Use your imagination to think of quiet ways to entertain yourself. Be sure to give thanks to the universe for what you have.

Soul Affirmation: Knowing I can do it is the biggest preparation for getting it done.

Lucky Numbers: 3, 9, 20

### GEMINI

While you may have much work facing you in the beginning of the week, a steady, patient attitude will help you accomplish a great deal this week. Be good to yourself and take things nice and slow. You'll finish what you need to.

Soul Affirmation: The sunlight of my spirit shines in the land beyond the horizon.

Lucky Numbers: 6, 16, 40

### CANCER

This week is another week when your intuition and insights are remarkable. A lesson you learned in the past may suddenly reveal itself as a great blessing this week. You'll have plenty of food for thought.

Soul Affirmation: I paint my world in colors of the rainbow.

Lucky Numbers: 1, 25, 50

### LEO

Someone whose values are different than yours may annoy you this week if you let them. Let your most tolerant mindset rule, and enjoy being able to listen to others' points of view. You'll feel very blessed by the end of the week.

Soul Affirmation: Change is my middle name.

Lucky Numbers: 12, 42, 54

### VIRGO

You learn something this week that makes you very happy. One of your most wonderful gifts is your ability to be delighted with all forms of learning and education. This is a terrific week for personal delight.

Soul Affirmation: Trust gives me a deep sense of peace and joy.

Lucky Numbers: 27, 33, 45

### LIBRA

Shopping has its appeals this week, and you'll want to check your bankbook balance before indulging in anything that is whimsical and expensive. Give yourself hours to think about what's important to you. Control impulses this week.

Soul Affirmation: I change the way I look at business this week.

Lucky Numbers: 5, 10, 18

### SCORPIO

A road trip might be in the offing; grab a friend and go Dutch-treat. You'll enjoy yourself more if you are sharing costs this week. Mutual generosity in all things will make your week perfect.

Soul Affirmation: As chances come around again, I take advantage of them.

Lucky Numbers: 4, 11, 32

### SAGITTARIUS

This week is likely to make you feel young again. You'll want to play jokes and tricks on people around you. Make sure they are ready to deal with your playful mood. Enjoy yourself, you fabulous being!

Soul Affirmation: Superficiality is often the best route to clarity.

Lucky Numbers: 14, 15, 17

### CAPRICORN

You have more of a flair for communication this week than usual. Keep your words diplomatic but effective if your opinion is called for. A relative seeking advice will be glad they asked you.

Soul Affirmation: I make the first step and the universe will come to my aid.

Lucky Numbers: 9, 13, 29

### AQUARIUS

Don't sweat the small stuff this week. You have a keen eye for the big picture, and you'll be most productive if you ignore the petty this week. Your home is very happy tonight! Count your blessings!

Soul Affirmation: Cheerfully handling what comes at me is the test of who I am.

Lucky Numbers: 24, 31, 46

### PISCES

Your energy level remains high; be careful not to overdo it, but enjoy the wonderful feeling of your physical self as much as possible. A phone call from a friend who lives far away will brighten your week and inspire you with travel plans.

Soul Affirmation: Slow and easy is the best way for me to travel this week.

Lucky Numbers: 18, 25, 55