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Mary A. Keith, PhD, LD/N  
Hillsborough County Extension Agent  
(813) 744-5519, ext. 136  
email: [makeith@mail.ifas.ufl.edu](mailto:makeith@mail.ifas.ufl.edu)

### Skip the Palm Oil

We now have *trans fats* on food labels. That's good news! Customers are learning to read labels and avoid foods that have trans fats. That's good news! Trans fats are linked to higher rates of heart disease and artery problems. So the less of them we eat, the healthier we are likely to be.

Most trans fats are produced when vegetable oils are hydrogenated, but not all hydrogenated fats are trans fats. And not all foods that contain partially hydrogenated oils have trans fats. But most of them do, and many customers are smart enough to read the ingredient list and avoid foods with partially hydrogenated oils.

Still, partially hydrogenated oils are very useful. They don't get rancid as fast as oil does. They stay solid and don't leak or make packages greasy the way oils do. So manufacturers of packaged goods have been looking for substitutes.

Some 'natural' oils that have many of the right characteristics are palm and palm kernel oil. They are plant oils, but because they have a lot of saturated fat they don't get rancid like other oils. That means they can be used in crackers, baked goods and packaged mixes that might sit on a store shelf for a long time but will still taste fresh.

The idea was that because they are 'natural' vegetable oils they won't cause the same health problems that hydrogenated oils do. We could use them instead of hydrogenated oils and be safe. Unfortunately, recent research is finding that these plant oils also cause our 'bad' LDL cholesterol to go up, just like lard or shortening does.

That is not good news!

We should all look for foods with less fat, and try to limit how much fat we eat, from whatever source. When cooking, use canola or olive oil. These have no effect on heart health. Still, we need some fat, and fat makes foods taste good. We shouldn't try to avoid all fats. But, whether you are buying margarine or crackers, chips or cake mix, look first for a label that says "trans fat - 0 g". Then look at the ingredient list. If palm oil or palm kernel oil is close to the top of the list, look for another brand. There are healthier alternatives available for almost every food. Eat to enjoy both the food and a healthy life!

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