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Happy New Year, Healthier New Labels

Beginning this month, January 2006, all the Nutrition Facts box on all food labels should have a line for *trans fats*. It is just below the saturated fat line. It will say 'trans fat', then the number of grams. But unlike the other nutrients on the label, there will not be a percentage in the final column. That's because there is no recommended daily intake of trans fats. The less of them you eat, the better.

Trans fats are produced when vegetable oil is partially hydrogenated to make it solid. Solid fats don't turn rancid as fast as oils do. That means that baked goods (such as crackers and cookies), cake mixes and popcorn will still taste good after weeks in the warehouse and on the shelf. It also means that fried foods (French fries, fish sticks, etc.) will taste better and cost less.

Not all hydrogenated fat is *trans fat*. Only a very small percent becomes a *trans fat*. But *trans fats* don't work the same in our bodies as other fats. They raise bad cholesterol and lower good cholesterol. They might have something to do with Alzheimer's disease, macular degeneration, gallstones, and maybe even inflammation of the arteries. That's why there is no recommended level. We don't know if any level is safe.

With the new labeling rules you will now be able to compare several brands of the same product to select the one with the least *trans fat*. Manufacturers have been working hard to remove *trans fats* from their products. Just because the label says "partially hydrogenated vegetable oil" does not automatically mean there are *trans fats*

in the food.

However even if the label says the *trans fat* content is 0 g, it might not mean there are no *trans fats*. Anything under 0.5 g (half a gram) per serving may be labeled as 0 g. If you eat a lot of fried food or commercial baked goods you could still be getting a significant amount of *trans fat*. So it's still a good idea to keep these products to a very small part of your diet.

With this New Year's present from the FDA, it's now going to be easier for us to select a healthier diet. Use it, read the labels, eat lots of fruits and vegetables, get your exercise, and look forward to a Healthy New Year!