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## Eat at Home for Your Own Good

By Adam Voiland

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It's been a rough year for trans fats. First came the scarlet letter from the FDA requiring that the artificial, artery-clogging substances be clearly identified on nutrition labels. Then New York City and Chicago proposed citywide restrictions (New York's passed in December). And as lawsuits pile up, some of trans fats' best friends—including chains like KFC and snack makers like Kellogg—have been scrambling to dump the stuff from their recipes.

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Trans fats are clearly on their way out. Indeed, expert Walter Willett of Harvard University predicts they'll be nearly gone in five years. But there's a catch: The FDA labeling rule applies only to food sold in stores; it does not apply to restaurants, bakeries, and deli counters. So it's more than likely that you're still eating trans fats when you eat out. And eating out you are. In 1970, Americans spent just 26 percent of their total food budget eating away from home; in 2002, the number was 46 percent.

**Home cooking.** The solution is obvious: Eat at home more. "You can't protect yourself unless you fix your meals at home from scratch," says Suzanne Havala Hobbs, author of *Get the Trans Fat Out*. That's because home cooking techniques typically use far fewer trans fats than restaurants. And when they do, it's easy to cut the offending fats out: Simply read the ingredients and banish anything with "partially hydrogenated vegetable oil" or "solid shortening" from your recipes (substituting healthful liquid oils such as olive oil and canola oil). But when scanning labels, be wary of the footnote "not a significant source of trans fat." That actually means the food in question can have up to 0.5 gram of trans fat per serving even though the label says zero.

For people less gung-ho about cooking, experts recommend vigilance when eating out. Many restaurants, including biggies McDonald's and Burger King, still use trans fats, and only about half of large chains make nutritional information available, though this is often via the Internet and not always readily accessible. Go find it. And ask your waiter if recipes use partially hydrogenated vegetable oils. "If they don't know what you're talking about, you probably don't want to eat there," says Willett.

Restaurants are improving, and some, like Legal Sea Foods, have made a real effort to eliminate trans fats. But there's no way around the fact that a growing pile of research suggests that eating out plays a key role in America's obesity epidemic. That's because, trans fats aside, home-cooked food is usually lower in other nutritional bogeymen like saturated fat, sodium, and sugar, and higher in good nutrients like fiber, calcium, and iron. Dinner at home is a winning recipe.

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