

NEWS RELEASE

Trans fatty acids are *good* for the heart?

(Winnipeg, December 1, 2009) Research scientists at St. Boniface Hospital and University of Manitoba have published a study suggesting that vaccenic acid (VA) – a natural trans fatty acid found in small amounts in milk and dairy products like yogurt and cheese – could actually aid in reducing the incidence of heart disease. This finding indicates that we can no longer assume that all trans fats are harmful.

The study, published in the *Journal of Nutrition* in collaboration with scientists from the University of Laval, was led by Dr. Grant Pierce, a member of the Institute of Cardiovascular Sciences at St Boniface Hospital and a Professor of Physiology within the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Manitoba. The work indicated that a diet fed to animals including the trans fat vaccenic acid helped protect against atherosclerotic plaque buildup in arteries – the primary cause of blockages resulting in a heart attack or stroke. The study measured actual reductions in arterial plaque by eating natural trans fats - by as much as 31%.

“It is clear from our study that not all trans fats cause harm to our blood vessels. Industrially hydrogenated trans fats are found in vegetable shortening and baked goods like cookies and donuts. Eating these trans fats caused mice to develop plaques, whereas eating natural trans fats did not. In fact, our research demonstrates that natural trans fats actually prevented plaque buildup,” said Dr. Chantal Bassett, a graduate student in Dr. Pierce’s lab and lead author on the paper.

Dr. Pierce, Executive Director of Research at St. Boniface Hospital explained, “This research has important significance for the meat and dairy industries. Meat and dairy products contain natural trans fats, mainly in the form of vaccenic acid. These meat and dairy trans fats may have been a concern to us prior to our study. We can now consume these products with confidence that it is a healthy part of our diet.”

Isabelle Neiderer, Director of Nutrition for Dairy Farmers of Canada, adds “These interesting findings add to the growing scientific evidence showing that industrial and natural trans fats have different effects on blood lipids and cardiovascular risk and they also lend support to a recent WHO scientific review which stated that natural trans fats, in amounts usually consumed, do not seem to be a risk factor for coronary heart disease. “

“This is another great example of how Canadian research is leading the way in helping Canadians and citizens around the world to make healthier nutritional decisions,” said Dr. Peter Liu, Scientific Director at the Canadian Institutes of Health Research’s Institute of Circulatory and Respiratory Health. “Educating Canadians on the differences between natural, healthy and industrial manufactured unhealthy trans fatty acids in their diet will help to further lower their cholesterol levels and their chance of developing heart diseases.”



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This research now emphasizes the need to educate the public in regards to trans fats. Natural trans fats do not cause the same harm as industrially hydrogenated trans fats. Eating a small amount of natural trans fats from meat and dairy products can benefit cardiovascular health.

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