

Every summer, my son attends a wonderful school in downtown Lexington. The morning summer school commute takes us past several fast food restaurants. Initially, I paid no notice. However, after making this commute five mornings out of seven for eight weeks, something quite interesting recurrently caught my eye. The object of interest was the line of cars lined up neatly bumper to bumper patiently awaiting the drive through service offered by fast food restaurant "X". Clearly, the wait was worth it because the line of cars containing hungry, caffeine deprived morning commuters seemed to grow with each passing morning.

By nature, I tend towards being slightly impatient, so I have found drive through window experiences to be tedious no matter how quickly the line of cars advances. I have never experienced a gustatory experience in an establishment offering drive through service that I felt was worth the wait. However, clearly I am in the minority, at least by my observations. And it appears that the more colorful the awning, the more advertisement of numbers of patrons served, and the more economical the food being advertised, the longer the line of patient patrons awaiting drive through service. I marveled at the number of people waiting for a convenient, hot, trans-fat laden, "death by drive through" food item.

The medical winds of change continue to blow bringing with them a greater appreciation for the novel concept of *disease prevention*. Integral to this process is *patient education*. Rather than waiting until the effects of the food we consume to cause slow yet certain death and destruction, it seems far more worthy a cause to prevent the entry of said food items into a person's body in the first place. Unfortunately, thanks to everyone's overly filled daily schedules, the expense of eating healthy, and the lack of local health advocacy, planning and preparing healthy meals has dropped to the bottom of the priority list. Unfortunately, sacrificing health for convenience and expense yields future health consequences that are difficult to reverse and even more expensive.

One of the primary food additive "killers" are trans fats. On a nutritional label, they appear as "partially hydrogenated ... oil". The first hydrogenated fats were produced by Proctor and Gamble in 1911 in the form of Crisco shortening. One decade later, these products were used in the preparation of numerous baked goods. Under the peripheral influences of cost and incorrectly propagated health assertions, the use of trans fats in processed foods grew steadily. Currently, most trans fat containing food items are located in the center aisles of the grocery stores. Fast food restaurants, hospitals, and public schools also serve food high in trans fats, which in the latter to situations is probably surprising.

The adverse health effects of trans fats have been documented in the medical literature since the late 1980's. The cause for concern stemmed from the rapid rise in heart disease. Trans fats are known not only to raise levels of LDL ("bad") cholesterol but also to lower levels of HDL ("good") cholesterol. Additional research has also shown correlations between trans fat consumption and Alzheimer's disease, diabetes, obesity, and infertility. A 2006 scientific review published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* stated that trans fat consumption resulted in no health benefits and considerable potential harm and should therefore not be consumed. In

2003, the *World Health Organization* recommended the total intake of trans fats be less than 1% of overall energy intake.

Equipped with this relatively new knowledge, action towards a solution has been slowly emerging. Financial gain appears to be the primary obstacle. Some countries have been quicker to action than others. In 2003, Denmark became the first country to ban the sale of foods containing trans fats. Other countries, such as Canada and Switzerland, have followed suit. In this country, the ball has slowly started rolling. More action is also being taken by individual states. California has been a leader in this regard and plans to ban the use of trans fats in restaurants and baked goods completely by 2011. Other progressive states include Texas, Michigan, New York, Minnesota, and now....Kentucky? Not so fast....

Earlier this month, the Louisville Metro Board of Health agreed to support a plan to eliminate the use of trans fats in bakeries, restaurants, and schools in under two years. Unfortunately, the system of checks and balances is often overshadowed by an apparently more important commodity than health...money. If the Metro council ratifies the proposed ban, there are concerns about the financial ramifications on local businesses. Even though the ban is expected to save approximately \$22 million annually in health care expenditures, the odds are not stacked in its favor since the mayor of Louisville and the president and CEO of the KY Restaurant Association both actively oppose it. Trans fats are apparently a more “affordable” alternative.

For now, this means individuals need to be actively engaged in self education and avoidance. Perhaps Lexington can serve as Kentucky’s leader for initiating change. All in favor say “aye”.

The Top Ten Innocent Appearing Offenders

#1: Breakfast Cereals

#2: Quaker Oats Chewy Granola Bars

#3: Saltine Crackers

#4: Special K's entire line of health/weight loss food

#5: Girl Scout Cookies

#6: Microwave Popcorn

#7: Animal Crackers

#8: Fig Newtons

#9: Ritz Crackers