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## Say cheese: Not all trans fats are bad for health, review finds

BY NICKI THORAS, EDMONTONJOURNAL.COM SEPTEMBER 7, 2011

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Dr. Spencer Proctor, director of the U of A's Metabolic and Cardiovascular Diseases Laboratory, says natural and synthetic trans fats shouldn't be lumped together on nutrition labels.

EDMONTON - There's a difference between cookies and cows when it comes to trans fats, says a University of Alberta researcher calling for a change to the way food products are labelled.

A scientific review co-authored by Dr. Spencer Proctor, director of the university's metabolic and cardiovascular diseases laboratory, found that naturally occurring trans fat in dairy products and beef is different from the widely maligned synthetic variety found in shortening and baked goods. Developed by the food industry to increase shelf life and add flavour, synthetic trans fats have been found to be particularly bad for cardiovascular health.

The review, featured in the July issue of *Advances in Nutrition* — published by the American Society for Nutrition — suggested that natural trans fats, on other hand, may be good for your heart.

"We've lumped all trans fats in the same basket," Proctor said. "We really have to treat these two families of trans fats differently."

Presently, nutrition labels in Canada make no differentiation between natural and synthetic trans fats. When a shopper picks up a block of cheese or a tub of high-fat yogurt, they'll see a high amount of trans fat listed on the label, even though "hardly any" is synthetic, Proctor said.

"It may mislead the public," he said, adding that shoppers who bypass these products in favour of their low-fat counterparts miss out on nutrients such as calcium, as well as potential benefits to cardiovascular health.

Early research has suggested that natural trans fats are similar to polyunsaturated fatty acids and can reduce weight gain, cholesterol and may have anti-inflammatory qualities, Proctor said. His research in this area has been supported by the Alberta Livestock and Meat Agency, Alberta Milk and the Dairy Farmers of Canada.

The simplest remedy, Proctor said, is to include only synthetic trans fat on nutrition labels, something that's already done in Europe. Here, the information included on food labels is determined by Health Canada.

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