

Chronic Disease Prevention & Control in the Americas



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Regional Developments



Nutrition Experts Call for "Trans Fat Free Americas"

PAHO and WHO convened a Task Force of experts to discuss and provide recommendations for a **Trans Fat Free America (TFA)**. The task force members cited conclusive and undisputed

scientific evidence indicating that TFA consumption increases the risk of coronary heart disease and possibly enhances the risk of diabetes and obesity. Experts on nutrition and public health called for eliminating trans fatty acids from food supplies throughout the Western Hemisphere, at a special task force meeting convened by PAHO on 26–27 April 2007.

"To put it simply, trans fats are a toxic substance in our diets," said Enrique Jacoby, PAHO Regional Advisor on Healthy Eating and Active Living. "There is abundant evidence of this. There is also a consensus among our task force experts that phasing trans fat out of food supplies in the Americas is not only desirable but a feasible goal."

"This is something that can be done by major food producers in a matter of months or at most a couple of years, and it's being done by several food companies already," said Ricardo Uauy, president of the International Union of Nutritional Sciences and professor of public health nutrition at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

Uauy and Jacoby were among more than two dozen experts from North, South and Central America and the Caribbean who participated in the special task force formed to consider a PAHO proposal for a "Trans Fat-Free Americas." A draft of the group's conclusions will be circulated in the coming months

for feedback from PAHO member governments, academics and other experts, and representatives of the food industry.

Scientific studies have shown that trans fatty acids contribute to heart disease by raising levels of so-called "bad cholesterol" (low-density lipoprotein, or LDL), lowering levels of "good cholesterol" (high-density lipoprotein, or HDL), and damaging the cells in the linings of blood vessels, contributing to inflammation and blockage and leading to heart attacks.

A reduction of just 2–4 percent (of calories) in trans fat consumption in Latin America and the Caribbean could prevent between 50,000 and 230,000 heart attacks per year, said Dariush Mozaffarian, researcher and assistant professor at the Harvard School of Public Health.

Trans fats are found primarily in products that contain partially hydrogenated oils, whose longer shelf life and texture make them attractive for restaurants and food processors but which have negative effects on human health. Partial hydrogenation not only creates trans fats but also "destroys the healthy Omega-3 fats that are naturally in vegetable oils," said Walter Willett, professor of nutrition and epidemiology at the Harvard School of Public Health.

Regulatory efforts to eliminate trans fatty acids from food supplies are already under way in Denmark and

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in cities such as New York City and Philadelphia. Meanwhile, a number of food producers have voluntarily begun removing trans fats from their products, including Kraft Foods and Wendy's in the United States and Unilever in Europe. "This has turned out to be good for business," said Uauy.

In the Latin American region, health officials in Costa Rica and, more recently, Argentina have been working with food producers to drastically reduce trans fats, while Brazil is using labeling requirements, consumer warnings, and restrictions on advertising.

Experts at the PAHO meeting urged cooperation between health officials and private producers to accelerate the process of eliminating trans fats from the region.

"This is an area where we need to work alongside industry to develop a timetable for removing trans fats from the foods we eat and to help industry replace them with healthier alternatives," said Jacoby. "Fortunately, the food industry is receptive to these kinds of efforts, especially when consumers voice their concerns."

Members of the task force emphasized that not all fats are bad. "We are not just talking about reducing trans fats but about increasing healthy fats in the diet. This is a positive message," said Uauy. This week's task force meeting on "Trans Fat Free Americas" is part of larger PAHO efforts to address the growing burden of chronic diseases, including cardiovascular disease, a leading cause of premature death throughout the Americas, as well as stroke and diabetes, which are increasing at alarming speed in the region.

PAHO's efforts in this area also include a campaign Let's Eat Healthy, [Live Well and Get Moving, America!](#) to help member countries promote better nutrition and increased physical activity in their populations. These initiatives fall within the framework of PAHO's Regional Strategy on Chronic Disease Prevention and Control and its Strategy on Nutrition in Health and Development.

Source: [PAHO Media Advisory](#), reprinted with permission of PAHO Public Information Office.

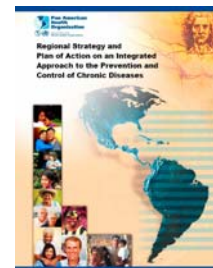


Progress in the Countries

Meeting of PAHO/WHO Representatives from Andean and Southern Cone Countries

Drs. James Hospedales and Branka Legetic of the PAHO Noncommunicable Disease (NC) Unit attended this meeting of the Andean Region and Southern Cone, held in Lima the week of 23 April 2007. The objective of the NC representatives was to put chronic disease prevention as a major item on the health policy agenda of the Andean and Southern Cone countries. Highlights of the meetings were:

- ➔ Dr. Manuel Peña, PAHO/WHO Representative (PWR) in Peru, and Dr. Juan Manuel Sotelo, PWR-Chile, agreed to become "champions" for NC programs among their counterparts in the Andean and the Southern Cone countries, respectively.
- ➔ The NC representatives met individually with all PWRS representing the Andean and Southern Cone countries—as well as with Dr. Abel Packer, Director of the Latin American and Caribbean Center for Health Sciences Information ([BIREME](#))—with the objective of presenting the [Regional Strategy on an Integrated Approach to the Prevention and Control of Chronic Diseases Including Diet, Physical Activity, and Health](#) (for a summary of the strategy, see the [first issue](#) of this newsletter).
- ➔ In their meeting with the NC representatives, the Chronic Disease Technical Team from the Peruvian Ministry of Health demonstrated that much progress has been made in the past two years in the areas of surveillance and clinical management.
- ➔ A meeting was held with a representative from the Andean Health Agency ([Organismo Andino de Salud / Convenio Hipólito Unanue](#)), resulting in an agreement to take a series of steps towards preparing a Resolution for the Ministers' Meeting in 2008, as well as a subregional project.



In conclusion, overall outcomes were positive, though much remains to be done in the way of follow-up. There are many good ideas for prevention and control at national and subregional levels, including involving

the non-health sectors. There is still a lot to be done in preventing risk factors and addressing social determinants, as Manuel Peña had stressed before. A national consultation in 2008 is being discussed that would provide an excellent venue for bringing all the elements together.

Announcements

Summit of Caribbean Community Heads of Government on Chronic Disease



The Caribbean suffers the highest mortality rates from chronic disease in the Americas. In view of this, the Caribbean Community Secretariat (**CARICOM**) is *initiating an intersectoral approach to this*

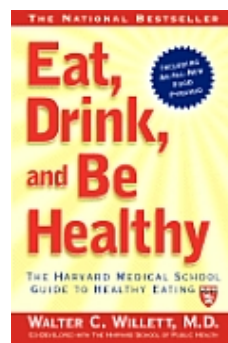
epidemic by convening the world's first Summit of Heads of Government on chronic disease. Dr. Denzil Douglas, Prime Minister of St Kitts and Nevis and holder of the health portfolio in the Quasi-Cabinet of CARICOM Heads, will be principal spokesperson. Prime Minister Patrick Manning of Trinidad and Tobago will host the summit on 14 September 2007.

The overall purpose of the summit is to convene the heads of government to discuss chronic diseases and create a multisectoral resolution for chronic disease prevention and health promotion (e.g., taxation, legislation, regulation, finance, trade and agriculture, education), which will serve as a catalyst for promoting health and preventing disease.

PAHO's main objective in this activity is to support the Heads of Government in their efforts towards formulating healthy public policies and afterwards to evaluate its applicability as a framework to be used in other countries/regions as a means of achieving healthy public policies.

Information Resources

Learn how to eat, drink, and be healthy!



The PAHO Noncommunicable Disease Unit sponsored a staff course by the world's most cited nutritionist, Dr. Walter Willett of Harvard University. The objective was for people to use their current knowledge of food groups and become healthier by integrating new knowledge into the traditional scheme with which they grew up.

The *new scheme* contains the following *key points*:

- ➔ Trans fat is the new villain; it is without a doubt bad for your health.
- ➔ Trans fat is much worse than saturated fat.
- ➔ Trans fat is fatal when it comes to coronary heart disease.
- ➔ Some fats, however—such as monosaturated and polyunsaturated fats—are actually necessary for good health and are not, as the author put it, the “huge evil poison” that people think they are.
- ➔ It is not fats as a whole but portion size that are the main factor in weight gain.
- ➔ Eating fish drastically reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease.
- ➔ A whopping 92% of type 2 diabetes and 72% of colon cancer can be avoided through better diet.
- ➔ A mere half hour of walking a day can be your first step to better health.

Willett's findings are based on nutritional research carried out on thousands of subjects over several decades. He is the author of more than 1,000 journal articles.

The PAHO/WHO Chronic Disease Program invites the readers of this newsletter to submit contributions of interest for the Americas. Send contributions (1–3 paragraphs) to Dr. James Hospedales (hospedaj@paho.org) with copy to Pilar Fano (fanopili@paho.org) and Suzanna Stephens (stephens@paho.org). Your feedback on this newsletter would be appreciated. Instructions and criteria can be found on the homepage for this newsletter at the web link below:

<http://www.paho.org/english/ad/dpc/nc/cronic.htm>