

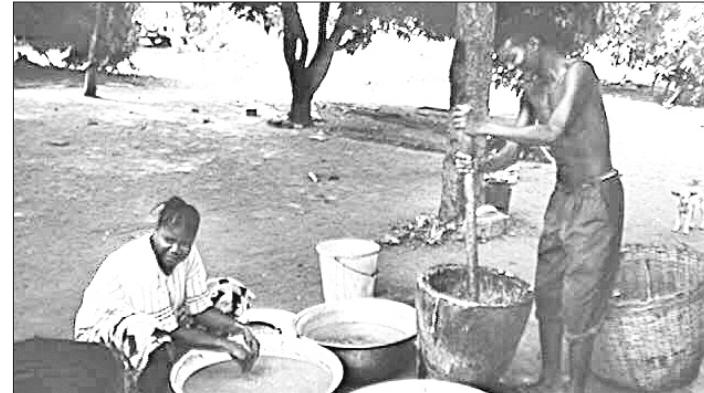


## Did you know?

Sterilisation services are provided free of charge in government institutions. Guidelines have been issued from time to time by the government covering various aspects of sterilisation.

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# WHO warns of trans fatty acid dangers



A way to produce zero trans products is to use palm oil as the source of hard fats.

DR AHMAD IBRAHIM

The world was recently gripped with almost hysterical fear. A new pneumonia like disease, now widely known as severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome SARS, created panic among the general public in many countries notably China, Hongkong, Taiwan and even as far away as in Canada. So far it has claimed more than 600 lives. Scientists so far could not

find any cure. And no less than 9,000 people are known to have contracted the deadly virus, apparently a close cousin of the coronavirus associated with the common cold. The WHO has been at the centre of efforts to contain the spread of the disease.

In a way the disease has demonstrated how vulnerable the global community can be to any such kind of virus attack.

As a custodian of global health, the WHO has over the

years embarked on various initiatives not only to find solution to such infectious and communicable diseases, but also to educate the world on preventive measures for chronic diseases including heart ailments, cancer, diabetes and the like. Many studies have shown that diets do play an important role in the development of such chronic diseases. So every few years, the WHO has come out with recommendations on a healthy lifestyle to ward off such diseases including proper dietary guidelines.

Such recommendations are often always used by member countries as policy instruments on health.

In April, the WHO came out with one such report.

An earlier report released in 1989 was not well received especially from the tobacco and sugar business.

The report then came out with strong recommendations against smoking and high intake of sugar.

Fat is the other category of food products which has always been singled out for mention. This is because excessive intake of fats have been found to give rise to cardiovascular diseases. How-

ever, while in the 1989 report the focus was on saturated fats, this time around the WHO has produced disturbing evidence on the deleterious nature of trans fats. These are fats produced when soft oils like soyabean and sunflower are partially hydrogenated in the manufacture of products like margarine, bakery fats and allied products.

In this latest report which was prepared by a fairly extensive expert consultation comprising 30 international high caliber nutritionists, the WHO has come out with serious warning on the dangers of trans fats.

For the first time, this world body has concluded that trans fatty acids are injurious to the heart. In fact, the report has produced convincing evidence on the fact that trans fat is much worse than saturated fats.

While saturated fats raises both the bad and the good cholesterol, trans fats raises the bad Low Density Lipo-protein (LDL) and suppress the good High Density Lipo-protein (HDL) cholesterol, making it even worse.

They have now recommended that the intake of trans fats in the diet should be re-

stricted to less than 1 per cent of the energy consumed by the body which works out to be less than 2 to 3 grams a day.

Earlier, the Institute of Medicine, US Food and Nutrition Board came out with an even stricter intake limit for trans fat. They called for "zero tolerance" of trans meaning trans fats should be avoided at all costs.

Such conclusions by the WHO will obviously have implications on the international trade in oils and fats. In countries like the US and Brazil where soyabean and sunflower oils are available in large quantities, it is common practice for makers of margarine and shortening to use such partially hydrogenated oils as the hard fat ingredient.

Now that trans fat is hailed as a dangerous precursor of heart ailments, such practice is hard pressed for change. In fact lately many food manufacturers have started to look at alternatives to circumvent the trans route.

Of course, for those in the palm oil industry, such development should come as a pleasant surprise. This is because in the

manufacture of such solid fats products like margarine and shortening, the only way to produce zero trans products is to use palm oil as the source of hard fats, in place of partially hydrogenated soyabean or sunflower oils. This is basically the reason why in countries like the EU, China, Pakistan, Egypt and India where palm oil is widely consumed, their solid fat items are virtually free of trans.

There is no doubt that this latest announcement on the dangers of trans fats by such international body as the WHO will have far reaching implications on the fate of partially hydrogenated oils. Palm oil is set to reap tremendous commercial benefits from such finding. If all these years, palm oil has been at the receiving end of much ill advised ridiculing by the soft oils, it looks like this new revelation has put palm oil in a truly enviable position. Palm oil may well be having the last laugh!

The writer is Director of Marketing and Promotion, Malaysian Palm Oil Promotion Council, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

## Trans fatty acids and risk of coronary heart disease

energy (about 5 g a day).

Trans fatty acids are found in natural foods such as milk, cheese, eggs and meat; in manufactured products such as oils, margarine and baked goods; and in deep-fried foods. Although studies found that the effect of trans fatty acids from manufactured and natural sources to be similar, the majority of trans fatty acids are consumed from either manufactured or deep fried foods. It would therefore be prudent to reduce consumption of these to decrease the risk of coronary heart disease. Trans fatty acids are not listed on food ingredient labels, but hydrogenated or partially-hydrogenated oils are, and so these are the ingredients to look for and either avoid or use sparingly.

Current trans fatty acid intake contributes between 0.5 per cent and 2.1 per cent to total energy intake in western Europe.

Studies show a two per cent increase in trans fatty acid intake increases the risk of coronary heart disease by approximately 25 per cent. It is therefore advisable to follow the current recommendation that trans fatty acids contribute no more than 2 per cent of

<http://www.jr2.ox.ac.uk/bandolier/booth/hlivin/gtfachd.html>

## Acid Survivors Foundation in the forefront

The trend of acid throwing has been changing. From what it was ten years ago, it has now drastically changed due to social awareness and stringent laws.

TAREQ SALAHUDDIN

Executive director of Acid Survivors Foundation (ASF), Monira Rahman, talked to the Star Health Desk last week and shared her views on the problems and future plans of the Foundation.

When did you join ASF and how it came into being?

I joined ASF in 1998. There was a proposal to British High Commission from Spain to organise a trip with a group of acid survivors from Bangladesh for their treatment. Dr John Morrison, the first executive director of ASF, who was initially involved with the project, realised while organising the trip that there was no scope for rehabilitation for acid survivors and no one to provide support. He then felt the necessity of establishing the Acid Survivors Foundation with the aims to offer free treatment services and also provide social and psychological support.

Why did you join and how do you think you can contribute in the field?

Before joining the foundation I worked at a non-government organisation for the welfare of the society. I always felt the necessity to do something positive for our community from my social commitment. In 1999 I attended a seminar on child rights and witnessed two acid survivors. Seeing the severe physical disfigurement of some of the survivors I became quite shocked. But when I talked to them I found the profound inner mental strength that moved me to do something for them.

There is very scanty support for the rehabilitation of acid survivors from the government. ASF is putting its best efforts for the rehabilitation of acid survivors.

The main problem is the lengthy procedure to implement various projects. We have talked with the ministries of health, law, home, women and children's affair and ministry of social welfare. The ministry of law has modified the Act on Prevention of Women and Child Abuse (95)

Regarding acid throwing, has this trend declined or has it been increasing and why?

The trend of acid throwing has been changing. From what it was ten years ago, it has now drastically changed due to social awareness and stringent laws.

What is being done to prevent this dreadful act in society?

The social work for the prevention of acid throwing is very negligible. Advocacy and try to change social values regarding acid throwing.

Compared to other countries where do you put ASF's initiative?

I am very pleased to inform that ASF is the leading foundation that works for acid survivors in the sub-continent. I do not know of any other organisation working on principles the way ASF is working.

About rehabilitation of the survivors, are you happy with the present support programme?

The present support programmes are not enough to manage the present crisis. We do not even have a specialised hospital exclusively for the acid burn cases. There is a burn operation theater at Dhaka Medical College Hospital, and there are only eight beds allocated for the patients of plastic surgery, reconstructive surgery and burn cases.

What are your partners and how do you describe in general people's response to support survivors?

We work with UNICEF and different NGOs based at home and abroad. At home we work with BRAC, Jatiya Mahila Sangstha, BSEHR and some other organizations having common focus.

Adequate human resources are needed for the treatment of the acid survivors. What the people can do is to promote the social values to prevent acid throwing. To change the mentality of our community is very much necessary to prevent the dreadful crime.



## Oral hazards during pregnancy

DR SHAH JAMAL MOLLA

it through trial and error method. At the initial stage we did not realise that the problem was so big.

We have only one burn hospital under construction. Do you think this is enough to address the problem or do you feel there should be more such hospitals?

We are working on four aspects with the acid survivors. We work for the treatment of victims, provide legal support to the survivors, arrange rehabilitation and protection of acid throwing.

We have a 31 bed nursing care unit in the capital. We work for the survivors with a nationwide networking system incorporating different NGOs and our volunteers. We help the victims to take legal action against the accused. ASF also offers all necessary facility for further treatment like re-constructive surgery, skin grafting and plastic surgery.

Furthermore, we work for the advocacy to prevent acid throwing and try to change social values regarding acid throwing.

Compared to other countries where do you put ASF's initiative?

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