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**Eating Healthy
by
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Our story begins three years in the future. We see a slightly stooped, middle-aged couple stop at the entrance of a dark alley in New York City, just a couple of blocks west of Central Park. They glance all around them, trying to act casual, and then walk quickly into the darkness. The sound of their leather heels on the cobblestones echoes menacingly in their ears as it joins the scurrying, slithering sounds of those creatures of the night whose home they've invaded. Neither of them has done this before but, hitching the collars of their coats up a little more around their face, they continue their walk. A mottled, uncovered red light bulb flickers dimly in the distance, like a beacon revealing their ultimate destination, and as they draw nearer they see the damp, metal rimmed steps leading down to a darkened doorway. Looking furtively over their shoulders once again, they carefully descend the stairs and approach the door.

The man taps three times quickly on the door... a three second pause...then two more taps. A small, opaque window in the door, unseen before, slides open just enough to allow a pungent, familiar, reminiscently pleasant odor to invade and caress their nostrils and brief, knowing smile crosses their faces. As a stream of Pavlovian drool begins to find its way down their chins, a shadowy figure looks out at them and a gruff voice asks, "Yeah... whatta ya' want?"

The woman shudders suddenly and turns to run, but the man grabs her wrist pulling her back and quickly checks the scribbled words on the inside of a match book cover and answers timidly... almost mechanically, "Emeril sent us, and we like fat." The kathunk... kathunk of latches being slid back is heard... the door slowly opens on hinges badly needing oil... and the shadowy figure says, "You're okay... come on in."

What you just read is merely a figment of my imagination but what you're about to read could potentially make the above scenario a reality. Can you remember when you used to be able to pick up a handful of home baked cookies with a large glass of milk and sit down to enjoy them while watching TV... not anymore. We are bombarded so much concerning all those nasty ingredients that go into the making of our sweets and other foods that we've become almost paranoid about what goes in our mouths. The current culprit du jour is Trans Fat, and what we're learning about it is down right scary, making us believers that it probably has been responsible for 25% of all coronary heart disease related deaths in the United States.

"No foods containing artificial trans fat . . . shall be stored, distributed, held for service, used in preparation of any menu item or served in any food service establishment , " is such a little phrase in print, but such a large edict in reality to the millions who live, work and visit New York City. This short sentence is the heart (no pun intended) of the new law passed by the New York City Board of Health on December 5th, 2006... just a couple of weeks ago. Of course, in addition to making the citizenry of New York a healthier lot, it will also increase the price of all meals served by any and all restaurants who serve any kind of food throughout the city. I'm assuming the ban will also include the few thousand street vendors who sell those to die for New

York pretzels whose pungent odor wafts through the brick and glass canyons of the Big Apple and has become as much a part of the city as the Empire State Building.

What are Trans Fats, anyway, and what's the big deal? Well, my sources tell me Trans Fat is made when manufacturers add hydrogen to vegetable oil...a process called hydrogenation, which increases the shelf life and flavor stability of foods containing these fats. Trans fat can be found in vegetable shortenings, some margarines, crackers, cookies, snack foods, and other foods that use hydrogenated oils in their preparation. Unlike other fats, the majority of Trans Fat is formed when food manufacturers turn liquid oils into solid fats like shortening and hard margarine. A small amount of Trans Fat is found naturally, primarily in some animal-based foods. Trans Fat, like saturated fat and dietary cholesterol, raises the LDL cholesterol that increases your risk for Coronary Heart Disease (CHD.) Trans Fats are said to lower the good cholesterol and raise the bad cholesterol, and, to paraphrase Larry the Cable Guy, "I don't care who you are, that can't be a good thing."

If you look real close at the food list above you'll see that Trans Fats are currently in just about everything you and I put into our mouths... all things that taste good. Tell me it ain't so Joe! I got to give up those delicious donuts and French fries... no way... you can't make me. Well, those that know say using non-hydrogenated oils to cook our favorite foods will hurt the taste somewhat but the ban's biggest impact will be to shorten the shelf life of foods, and the non-hydrogenated oils will break down and turn rancid more rapidly. That means restaurants will have to use more oil, which means more cost to them, which means more cost to you and me.

Just how stringent is the new ban and when will it be implemented? Restaurants in New York will have to stop using hydrogenated frying oils by July, 2007, and eliminate trans fats from all foods by July, 2008, so we're looking at about a year and a half to be totally Trans Fat free in New York City. One thing we must remember from all this, however, is that all fats are not bad for us and some are absolutely necessary for the healthy growth and development of our kids, so let's don't approach this thing of banning fat in public consumption willy-nilly. But, if the projection is correct concerning the reduction of heart attack deaths by at least 100 per year in New York City... this would have to be looked upon as a real good move.

So, as in days of prohibition, there could be those purists who will still seek out the forbidden fruit which would mean my stories beginning might be more fact than figment. We'll see... in the meantime, eat healthy.

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