

Press Release

DG PSQCA Vows to Limit Trans Fat Content in All foods for Public Health

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The Centre for Peace and Development Initiatives (CPDI) with the support of Global Health Advocacy Incubator (GHA) convened a roundtable discussion aimed at tackling the health risks linked to the consumption of industrially produced trans fatty acids (iTFA) in Pakistan. This gathering addressed the urgent need for evidence-based policies to safeguard public health and mitigate the detrimental effects of excessive iTFA consumption. During the discussion, Ismat Gul Khattak, Director General of the Pakistan Standards & Quality Control Authority (PSQCA), reiterated the commitment to enforcing the 2% limit of iTFA across all foods to combat non-communicable diseases effectively.

While moderating the discussion, Syed Raza Ali, Project Coordinator, CPDI explained that Pakistan ranked 2nd highest in the WHO-EMRO region in iTFA consumption followed by Egypt. This alarming statistic correlates with a surge in multiple Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) and cardiovascular diseases (CVDs), imposing significant economic burdens on both individuals and the nation as a whole. Moreover, studies have revealed that the elevated consumption of iTFAs is a primary dietary risk factor contributing to a staggering 65% of premature deaths caused by NCDs.

During the roundtable, it was also discussed the imperative for Pakistan to adopt stringent mandatory standards limiting iTFAs in all food supplies to no more than 2% of total fats as recommended by WHO. Such a policy, if effectively implemented, holds the potential to save numerous lives and alleviate the strain on healthcare infrastructure.

Dr. Khawaja Masuood Ahmed, National Coordinator, Nutrition and National Fortification Alliance (NFA), Ministry of NHR&C, emphasized the urgency of action. Key measures proposed included banning partially hydrogenated oils (PHOs), enforcing a 2% iTFA limit, and fostering collaboration with the Pakistan Standards & Quality Control Authority (PSQCA). Dr. Ahmed emphasized the importance of empowering regulatory bodies, advocating for PHO bans, and enhancing consumer awareness through clear labelling.

Mr. Munawar Hussain, Country Coordinator of GHA, highlighted the necessity of adopting global best practices in iTFA regulation. Despite substantial progress globally, Pakistan remains in the less restrictive category in the WHO scorecard. Sixty-one countries have adopted the best policies to limit iTFA consumption or ban PHOs to save lives, he further added. Urgent steps must be taken to prioritize public health and bridge this gap, he said.

Dr. Saba Amjad, CEO of Heartfile, shared iTFA consumption trends in Pakistan and said that we need continued collaborative efforts for the enactment of best practice TFA limits, awareness-raising, and capacity strengthening of regulatory authorities for monitoring.

Mr. Zubair Faisal Abbasi, development policy specialist, presented CPDI's policy dossier, outlining strategic policy pathways towards best-practice policy options, and thereby help saving precious lives falling prey to diseases, disabilities, and death. Proposals included establishing new technical committees or convening the National Standards Committee to endorse mandatory regulations for a 2% iTFA limit across all food categories. "With adoption of the best-practice policy options, Pakistan will be upgraded on the country-ranking of iTFA regulatory regimes on WHO global scale", he added.



The discussion concluded with an open session during which all stakeholders, including all food authorities, ministries of health and Science and Technology, and civil society working on similar issues, emphasized the immediate need for Pakistan to adopt best-practice policies, limiting iTFA content to less than 2% of fat in all food products. Strengthening enforcement mechanisms and adherence to standards are imperative to improve food governance and safeguard the population against the adverse health effects of iTFA consumption.

While concluding the seminar proceedings, Ms. Ismat Gul Khattak, Director General of the Pakistan Standards & Quality Control Authority (PSQCA), reiterated the commitment to enforcing the 2% limit across all foods to combat non-communicable diseases effectively. “I will immediately ask my directors to prepare recommendations on how to move fast on this track of policy adoption”, she added.

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