

Concerned mom takes a close look at city daycare menus [CA-ON]^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Scared by the reported health effects from trans fats, Toronto mother Andreea Ionescu decided to take a close look at the snacks her 2-year-old daughter Lia was being fed at her daycare.

Looking at product labels during a recent visit to the east-end centre, she found worrisome levels of trans fats in biscuits & a favourite of the youngsters there & other foods being served.

"I'm worried about the cumulative effect (of trans fats) on my daughter over time," Ionescu, 30, said in an interview this week.

"I'm also a chemistry major, and science and math teacher and studied this in university. It shocked me when I saw those biscuits."

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The central issue is that trans fat, used to give some foods flavour and a longer shelf life, has been linked to heart attacks, and suspected in other ailments like diabetes, neurological damage and breast and colon cancers. A report issued this past summer by a federal task force called for significant reductions in trans fats & made from partially hydrogenated vegetable oil & in margarines, oils and other foods.

In Toronto, those concerns have prompted children's services to launch a review of the menus in the 56 city-run daycares. And public health is expected to release its own report next month, part of which is expected to touch on how trans fats are impacting on city-run child-care centres.

At Ionescu's daycare, they've stopped using margarine, and switched to biscuits with zero, or very low trans fats.

"I'm somewhat relieved, but I want them (trans fats) completely eliminated in my daughter's daycare and other daycares too," says Ionescu, whose diet at home consists almost exclusively of organic foods, and zero trans fats.

Currently the city's child-care operations & the 56 centres have a licensed capacity for 3,062 children up to age 12 & adhere to requirements under Ontario's Day Nurseries Act and the Canada Food Guide regarding the amounts and types of foods kids should be getting in day care.

"Given the interest in trans fats, we decided a more fulsome review of the foods that have them was needed," says Brenda Patterson, general manager with Children's Services. The review is being conducted in conjunction with Toronto Public Health, a nutritionist, and Municipal Child Care Services, the arm under Children's Services.

Patterson says several foods served in the centres, like cereals and rice cakes, have little or zero trans fats. Some cookies have small amounts, she says and so alternatives are being explored. A report from Children's Services is expected in the spring, Patterson says. A revamped menu would follow, first for the city-run child cares. Those centres are part of a network of 645 licensed daycare centres in Toronto, caring for 39,000 children. Because of subsidy arrangements with the city, any menu changes would likely carry over to all those centres, Patterson says.

Councillor Paula Fletcher, a member of the city's board of health, which is due to receive the Toronto Public Health report on trans fat next month, pushed for the Children's Services review.

"It's an important and timely issue; putting artificial fats into young children," Fletcher says.

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- reprinted from the Toronto Star

Region: Canada^[2]

Ontario^[3]

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