

# Trans-fat junk food to be targeted under EU plans

PRODUCERS of cookies, cakes, and frozen pizzas could all have to change their recipes under proposed new EU laws aimed at tackling trans-fats.

Measures to curb the amount of the harmful fat, which is linked to a higher risk of heart disease and cancer, in food is being considered at a European level.

Maximum levels of trans-fatty acids, or trans-fats which are formed during food production to give food a longer shelf life, could be set under the changes.

Studies suggest naturally occurring trans-fats are not as bad for heart health as manufactured trans-fats. Health concerns are mainly focused on trans-fats that are formed during the industrial production process. Such trans-fats can be made by adding hydrogen to vegetable oil

By Leah McDonald

through a process called hydrogenation.

Commercial baked goods such as cookies, cakes and doughnuts often contain these trans-fats.

Trans-fats have already been substantially reduced in foods but can still be found in popular products such as frozen pizzas and margarines.

Research published by the British Medical Journal has found that industrially produced trans-fats are linked to much greater risk of death and disease – a 34 per cent increase in mortality and a 28 per cent increase in coronary heart disease.

Obesity expert Professor Donal O'Shea said he would favour a more aggressive approach to eliminate trans-fats.

Professor O'Shea said yesterday: 'The current figure for cancer in Ireland are to double by 2040. And we know the kind of things that are driving it and one of them is trans-fats – they have a clear link with cancer and heart disease.'

Fine Gael MEP Mairéad McGuinness received confirmation from EU Health Commissioner Vytenis Andriukaitis that legislation is being considered to set maximum levels of trans-fats in food.

Yesterday Ms McGuinness, who is vice-president of the European Parliament, said she also wanted mandatory food labelling introduced so consumers know what foods contain these 'undesirable' fats. 'These industrially produced trans-fats offer no dietary benefits whatsoever and in fact cause real health concerns,' she said.

# Dr Mark Dooley



## MORAL MATTERS

# I was awestruck that my boy of four knew 'no man is an island'

**O**NE thing you don't expect to get from a four-year-old is a philosophy lesson. And yet, where else but from the mouth of a child does real wisdom flow? Where but in innocence is truth to be found? I have met with great minds, people who have pushed humanity along the path of progress. From my present perspective, however, none could hold a candle to the simple yet extraordinary insights of a child. In one small sentence, they can capture the essence of beauty, goodness and reality.

I was standing in the kitchen minding my own business when, out of the blue, our youngest put me on the spot. 'What,' he asked, 'does "you" mean?' Before I could even contemplate an answer, he said: 'You means me!'

He must have gathered I was rendered speechless because his next question was much more straightforward: 'What's wrong, Dad?'

How to tell a four-year-old that he has just cracked one of the great philosophical conundrums? How to tell him that, in three small words, he has distilled the essence of so many great works on the question of identity?

'You means me': How beautiful, clear and concise. That a young boy could even conceive of such an idea is nothing less than a minor miracle. Yet we have all experienced moments when children say and do things that leave us suspended in mid-air.

A child had caused his father to wonder about an enduring truth. When you point to me, you say 'you'. When I point to you, I also say 'you'. However, you are never a 'you' for yourself, but always a 'me'.

I know that sounds complicated, but it simply means that I never refer to myself as 'you'. I always refer to myself as 'me', unless of course I am talking to myself.

My son spotted the fact that, from your perspective, I am always referred to as 'you'.

There is more. You and I know who we are only because we understand the meaning of those little words 'you' and 'me'. I know who I am simply because I am not you. In other words, I know that I am Mark Dooley because I am not Matthew Dooley.

My identity as Mark is shaped by the fact that I am different from Matthew. Without Matthew I could not be distinguished as the person I am. This means that our differences form the basis of our individual identities.

You and I are different yet we are somewhat the same. While we may

lead distinct lives, we still need each other for affirmation and recognition. In John Donne's beautiful words: 'No man is an island entire of itself.'

Without you I could not be me. Each of us needs the other to come to a realisation of our own self-worth. Without your praise, encouragement, love and approval, I could never establish a sense of who I am in the world.

I need you just as you need me. Even now, as you read this column, you are fulfilling me in my vocation as a writer. Without your affirmation, or even your disapproval, I would experience a loss of self-identity.

Such is the case with all human life, but never more so than when it comes to love. If we all crave love, it is because we desire the unconditional affirmation of another. Our identities are never more secure than when we are endorsed by someone we adore.

Love is a process of constant self-giving. I surrender myself to you knowing that you surrender likewise. We are distinct, yet through love we surmount our separateness.

We could say that, through love, 'you means me'. You are you and I am still me, yet I am only me because of you. Without you, without your endless affection and affirmation, I simply would not be who I am.

To starve a child of love is not only to deprive him of security and certainty. It is to strip away that child's sense of self. It is to rob him of the constant confirmation he needs to flourish as a person in an unfamiliar world.

**E**ACH time you kiss your little darlings, you give them a gift of yourself. In saying 'I love you', you offer them the recognition they need to grow as self-assured people. And when they say 'I love you' in return, when they offer the gift of themselves, you will know that a beautiful identity is in the making.

'I love you': The words around which the whole of the moral life revolves. Much more than a simple declaration of fidelity, they are the source of lasting identity in a world where we cannot find our way home. To have lived life without ever having heard them is, indeed, to have lived as an island.

I smiled with amazement, told him he was spot on and, before I could say any more, he was gone. My little son ran away to play, self-assured and happy to be alive. I listened to his distant laughter, heard him imitate Mr Nosey and scold his brother for having disturbed his peace.

And then it welled up within me, that feeling of complete adoration that envelops you like the wings of an angel. I ran, held his tiny face in my hands, and exclaimed with sheer joy: 'You means me!'

—mark.dooley@daily@mail.ie—



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