

# FATTY ACID COMPOSITION OF EDIBLE OILS IN THE MALAYSIAN MARKET, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO TRANS-FATTY ACIDS

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## ABSTRACT

A total of 113 samples of various types of palm and palm kernel oil products, their fractions, palm-based and non-palm-based cooking oils obtained from local manufacturers and the retail market were analysed for their trans-fatty acid compositions and contents by capillary gas chromatography. Trans-fatty acids were generally absent in crude palm and palm kernel oils. However, they were present at 0.01%-0.06% in refined palm kernel products and 0%-0.61% in refined palm products, all well below the 1.0% level stipulated by some importers. These trans-fatty acids were formed from their natural cis-isomers as a result of the high temperature used during deodorization.

In cooking oil, the trans-fatty acid contents of palm-based products were 0.25%-0.67%, again well below 1%. However, in the non-palm-based cooking oils, the contents of the 14 samples ranged from 0.43%-3.83%. The higher contents in the non-palm-based oils were expected as they had high contents of unsaturated fatty acids, which are more prone to isomerization at elevated temperatures.

**Keywords:** trans-fatty acids, fatty acid composition, edible oils, palm-based cooking oils, non-palm-based cooking oils.

## INTRODUCTION

The nutritional attributes of *trans*-fatty acids have been a subject of concern among food scientists, nutritionists and consumers. A report by Mensink and Katan showed that *trans*-fatty acids affect cholesterol levels in much the same ways as saturated fatty acids (INFORM, 1990). Other animal studies have also revealed many adverse nutritional effects of *trans*-acids. They have been implicated as detrimental to health in terms of the metabolism of essential fatty acids, coronary heart and cardiovascular diseases (Sundram and Chang, 2000), foetal and infant development, and in the treatment of hypercholesterolemia (Simopoulos, 1996; Ong and Chee, 1994; Sundram, 1993).

In natural vegetable oils, the unsaturated acids are present in the *cis*-form. However, highly unsaturated vegetable oils are not suitable for many food applications such as margarines, shortenings, confectionery fats and vanaspati, where solid fats are required. They are thus hardened by catalytic hydrogenation during which the naturally occurring *cis*-unsaturated fatty acids are partly converted to the unnatural *trans*-isomer (*Figure 1*). Small amounts of *trans*-fatty acids are also formed from heat-induced isomerization during deodorization under high temperature (Kovari *et al.*, 1997; Bertoli *et al.*, 1997). The extent of isomerization is more serious in polyunsaturated oils. Depending on the type of unsaturated acids, different *trans*-isomers can be formed from the original *cis*-unsaturated fatty acids. *Figure 2* illustrates the possible *trans*-isomers that can be derived from linoleic and linolenic acids.

As a result of the many suspected undesirable effects of *trans*-acids, scientists have been

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**TABLE 1. TRANS-FATTY ACID CONTENTS (%) IN FATTY FOODS IN SOME COUNTRIES**

Country	Food		
	Margarine and shortening	Cooking and frying oil	Fries and snacks
America	21.61 - 40.65	-	4.6 - 35.1
Austria	<1 - 50	-	-
Belgium	n.d.* - 18.8	-	-
Canada	10.0 - 49.9	-	-
Denmark	1.4 - 22.3	-	-
France	0 - 62.5	-	-
Germany	0.15 - 4.88	-	0.44 - 22.01
Malaysia	0.6 - 10.2	-	-
United Kingdom	0.5 - 19.7	1.5 - 34.1	2.2 - 21.8

Note: \* n.d. – not detected.

spectroscopy (IR) or capillary gas chromatography. In this survey, all the samples were analysed by gas chromatography as the IR method lacks sensitivity and is not reliable if the total *trans*-fatty acids content is below 5% (Duchateau *et al.*, 1996; Ulberth and Henninger, 1996). Capillary gas chromatography can detect down to 0.01%. It can also separate the different *trans*-isomers in polyunsaturated oils, provided a column of suitable length and coated with a higher polar stationary phase is used.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Samples

A total of 113 different types of palm oil, palm kernel oil, their fractionated products (which were all unhydrogenated) and cooking oils were obtained from palm oil refineries throughout Malaysia and local retailers.

### Chemicals

The fatty acid standards used were from Sigma Chemicals. They included lauric, myristic, palmitic, stearic, oleic and elaidic acids. The standard fatty acid mixture for calibration was obtained from Supelco, USA (RM-6 for palm products, RM-5 for palm kernel oil products and RM-1 for non-palm-based cooking oils). All the reagents and solvents used were of AR grade.

### Preparation of Fatty Acid Methyl Esters (FAME)

FAMEs of the samples were prepared according to PORIM Test Method p3.4. About 0.05 g of the oil was dissolved in 0.95 ml hexane and 0.5 ml sodium methoxide. The reaction mixture (in a 2 ml vial) was

then shaken vigorously in a vortex mixer. The clear, separated methyl ester layer was dried with anhydrous sodium sulphate prior to injection into the gas chromatograph for analysis.

### Gas-liquid Chromatography

Analysis of the FAME was then carried out with a Hewlett Packard 6980 series chromatograph equipped with a flame ionisation detector and split injector. A fused silica capillary column coated with a highly polar stationary phase, Supelco SP2340 [100% poly(bis-cyanopropylsiloxane) – 60 m x 0.25 mm id x 0.2 µm], was used with He as the carrier gas. The oven temperature programmes for palm kernel oil products and non-lauric oils (palm oil products and other cooking oils) were:

Palm kernel oil products - 120°C to 185°C at 3°C min<sup>-1</sup>

Palm oil and other non-lauric oils - 185°C isothermal

The injector and detector temperatures were both set at 240°C while the split ratio was 1:100.

### Quantitative Analysis

The identities of the fatty acids were established by comparing their retention times with either those of authentic standards from Supelco, or those reported in the AOCS method using a similar column (AOCS, 1997). A typical chromatogram showing the peaks and retention times of the fatty acids (including the *trans*-isomers) of palm olein is shown in *Figure 3*. Calibration was established with standard mixtures of methyl esters from Supelco and the quantitative results obtained from the Hewlett Packard Chemstation.

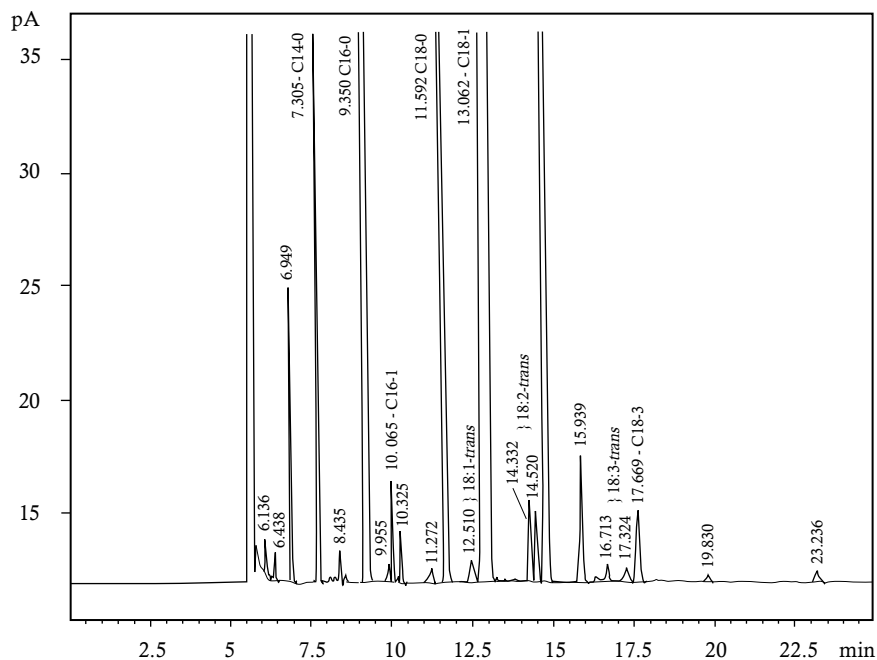


Figure 3. An enlarged GC chromatogram of fatty acid methyl esters from palm olein sample showing the retention times of various peak.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

One hundred and thirteen samples of various kinds of palm and palm kernel oils, their fractions, palm-based cooking oils and non-palm-based cooking oils were analysed. Table 2 summarizes the contents of *trans*-fatty acids obtained. Some comments can be made on the presence of *trans*-fatty acids in the samples analysed.

### Crude Palm Oil

No *trans*-acid was detected in all the 12 samples.

### RBD/NBD Palm Oil, Palm Olein, Palm Stearin and Superolein

These products are discussed together as they had similar ranges of *trans*-fatty acids. Overall, their mean contents were 0.22% - 0.32%. If the individual samples are considered, then the range is wider at between 0.0% - 0.61%.

Only four NBD oils were analysed - two palm oleins, one palm superolein and one palm stearin. Their *trans*-fatty acid contents ranged from 0.29% - 0.27%. Although the range was narrower than that in RBD palm oil (0.07% - 0.60%), the number of NBD samples was too small to establish any definite difference between the physically and alkaline refined oils.

As *trans*-fatty acids were not detected in the crude samples, their presence in the refined products must be due to isomerization during deodorization which is normally carried out at 250°C - 260°C under

vacuum. This is supported by the observation by Kochhar *et al.* (1982) that in the refining of crude soyabean oil (a highly unsaturated oil), *trans*-fatty acids were not detected in the neutralized and bleached oil, but only in the final product after deodorization.

### Red Palm Olein

Red palm olein is a specialty cooking oil with a high carotene content. The two samples from the local retail market showed only 0.0% - 0.2% *trans*-fatty acids. These low levels can be attributed to the special refining process which uses a low deodorization temperature to preserve the carotenes from thermal degradation.

### Crude Palm Kernel Oil

The oils were mechanically extracted using a screw-press. No *trans*-fatty acids were found in all the eight samples.

### RBD/NBD Palm Kernel Oil, Olein and Palm Kernel Stearin

The mean *trans*-fatty acid contents of the RBD/NBD palm kernel oils and their fractions ranged from 0.0% - 0.06%. Overall, the minimum and maximum for the individual samples were 0% and 0.11%, respectively, considerably lower than those observed in the palm oil products. Again, it is quite obvious that the presence of *trans*-fatty acids was due to isomerization during deodorization. No

**TABLE 2. TRANS-FATTY ACID COMPOSITIONS AND CONTENTS OF 113 SAMPLES OF PALM OIL AND PALM KERNEL OIL PRODUCTS, AND DIFFERENT COOKING OILS**

Sample	No. of Sample	Trans-fatty acid			Total trans-acid		
		C18:1 <i>t</i>	C18:2 <i>tc, ct, tt</i>	C18:3 <i>t</i>	Mean (%)	Ranges of values	Standard deviation
Crude palm oil	12	0.0	0.0-0.02	0.0	0.0	0.0-0.02	0.0
RBD palm oil	12	0.0-0.25	0.07-0.35	0.0-0.09	0.32	0.07-0.60	0.155
RBD palm olein	17	0.0-0.11	0.0-0.51	0.0-0.10	0.30	0.0-0.61	0.170
NBD palm olein	2	0.02-0.03	0.09-0.26	0.0-0.04	0.22	0.11-0.33	0.15
RBD superolein	4	0.0-0.04	0.08-0.36	0.0-0.05	0.22	0.08-0.45	0.143
NBD superolein	1	0.03	0.19	0.0	0.23	-	-
RBD palm stearin	12	0.0-0.12	0.0-0.40	0.0-0.03	0.26	0.08-0.40	0.132
NBD palm stearin	1	0.04	0.21	0.02	0.27	-	-
Red palm olein	2	0.0	0.0-0.2	0.0	0.1	0.0-0.2	0.14
Crude palm kernel oil	8	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	-	-
RBD palm kernel oil	7	0.0-0.07	0.0	0.0	0.01	0.0-0.07	0.021
NBD palm kernel oil	1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	-	-
RBD palm kernel stearin	6	0.0-0.11	0.0	0.0	0.06	0.0-0.11	0.051
RBD palm kernel olein	3	0.0-0.03	0.0-0.06	0.0	0.03	0.0-0.06	0.031
NBD palm kernel olein	2	0.0	0.0	0.0	-	-	-
Cooking oil, palm-based	9	0.0-0.09	0.09-0.63	0.0-0.13	0.46	0.25-0.67	0.190
Cooking oil, non-palm-based	14	0.0-0.08	0.39-2.69	0.0-2.67	2.03	0.46-3.83	1.370
Total	113						

*trans*-fatty acid was detected in the two NBD products. The low contents were expected as palm kernel oil and its fractions are much less unsaturated than palm oil products.

### Palm-based Cooking Oils

These were either pure palm olein or blends with peanut oil and sesame oil. However, the iodine values and fatty acid compositions suggested that these blends were mainly palm olein. *Trans*-fatty acids were found in every product at 0.25% - 0.67% with an average of 0.46%.

### Non-palm-based Cooking Oils

These are consumed by only a small section of the population and are generally more expensive. Their detailed *trans*-fatty acid compositions and contents are given in *Table 3*.

### Corn Oil

Four brands were analysed. The total *trans*-acids ranged from 1.13% - 1.96% with a mean of 1.64%. The main *trans*-isomers were those of linoleic acid and linolenic acid.

### Sunflower Oil

Three brands were analysed. The *trans*-fatty acids ranged from 0.63% - 2.99% with a mean of 1.42%. The major *trans*-isomers were those of linoleic acid as the linolenic acid content of sunflower oil is low.

### Safflower Oil

This is not a common cooking oil in the local market and only one brand was found. Though it was very high in diunsaturated acids, the *trans*-acids content was only 0.85%.

**TABLE 3. TRANS-FATTY ACID COMPOSITIONS AND CONTENTS OF NON-PALM-BASED COOKING OILS**

Cooking oil	No. of sample	Trans-fatty acid			Total trans-acid		
		C18:1 t	C18:2 tc, ct, tt	C18:3t	Mean (%)	Ranges of values	Standard deviation
Corn oil	4	0.03-0.05	0.75-1.50	0.18-0.43	1.64	1.13-1.96	0.356
Sunflower oil	3	0.0-0.08	0.55-2.69	0.0-0.24	1.42	0.63-2.99	1.360
Safflower oil	1	0.03	0.67	0.15	0.85	-	-
Soyabean oil	4	0.01-0.05	0.43-1.54	1.15-2.67	2.94	1.63-3.83	0.993
Peanut oil	1	0.0	0.46	0.0	0.46	-	-
Rapeseed oil (low erucic)	1	0.04	0.39	2.35	2.78	-	-
Overall non-palm-based cooking oil	14	0.0-0.08	0.39-2.69	0.0-2.67	2.03	0.46-3.83	1.370

### Soyabean Oil

Four brands were obtained. They contained 1.63% to 3.83% *trans*-acids and the mean was 2.94%. They had quite similar fatty acid compositions considering only the distribution of fatty acid chain lengths and not the geometric isomers. Thus, the wide range in *trans*-acids content could be attributed to variation in the processing method. The influence of different refining and deodorization treatments on the chemical changes in soyabean oil has been thoroughly investigated by Kochhar *et al.* (1982). As soyabean oil is well known for its high (about 8%) linolenic acid content, it was not unexpected that the samples had higher contents of the *trans*-isomers of linolenic acid than the other common polyunsaturated oils.

### Peanut Oil

Only one brand was analysed. It had high contents of arachidic acid (C20:0, 1.34%), behenic acid (C22:0, 3.54%) and lignoceric acid (C24:0, 0.16%) but the *trans*-acids were only 0.46%.

### Rapeseed Oil

The only sample analysed was a low erucic acid type. The *trans*-fatty acid content was 2.78%, comprising mainly the *trans*-isomers of linolenic acid. It was reported by Denecke (1995) that natural rapeseed oil contains only traces of *trans*-fatty acids, but during deodorization the level can rise to as high as 9%, depending on the temperature and time of heating used.

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The palm and palm kernel oil products sampled in this survey were quite exhaustive, as attempts were made to obtain samples from refineries throughout

Malaysia. All the refined products contained only very small amounts of *trans*-fatty acids, generally below 0.7%. Thus, they would easily satisfy the requirement for a maximum of 1.0% total *trans*-acids. As the refining conditions, especially the temperature of deodorization, are the causes of isomerization, care should be taken to optimize the refining conditions to minimize such changes (Siew, 1989).

In palm kernel oil and its fractions, the level of *trans*-isomers is not an issue as they are relatively low in unsaturation and the deodorization temperature used is often milder at 240°C or below. Many of the non-palm-based cooking oils contained more than 1% *trans*-fatty acids as they were more unsaturated and, therefore, more susceptible to isomerization during deodorization.

All in all, this survey provided further evidence that palm and palm kernel oil products are excellent hard-stocks for *trans*-free formulation of texturized fatty products such as margarines, shortenings, confectionery fats and vanaspati. These products can advantageously replace hydrogenated fats which contain not only *trans*-fatty acids, but also possibly a host of other unnatural and polymerized fatty acids formed during hydrogenation to reduce their unsaturation (Hoffman, 1989).

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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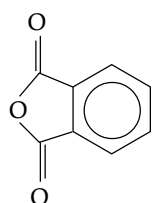
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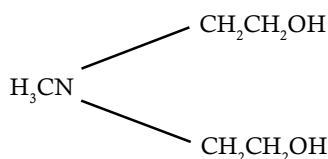
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## ERRATA

Please note the typographical errors in the structures of phthalic anhydride and N-methyl-2,2'-imino-diethanol (MDEA) on pages 8 and 12 of *Journal of Oil Palm Research Vol.13 No. 2*. The errors are regretted. The correct structures are:

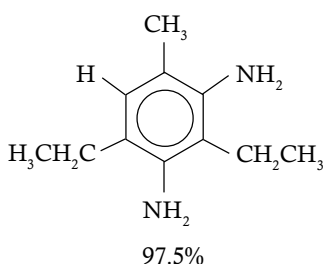


Phthalic anhydride

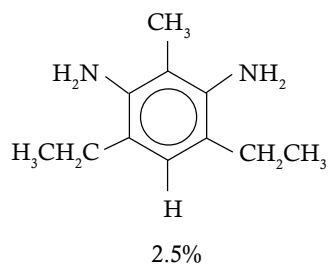


MDEA

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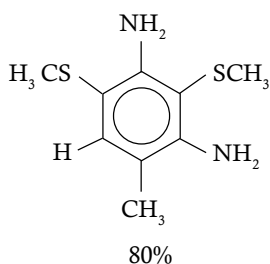


2,4-diethyltoluene-1,3-diamine

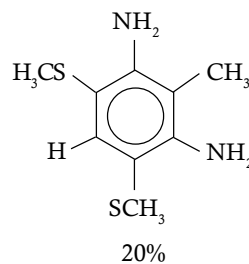


2,4-diethyltoluene-1,5-diamine

### Ethacure 300:



1,3-benzenediamine-4-methyl-2,6-bis(methylthio)-



1,3-benzenediamine-2-methyl-1-4,6-(methylthio)-

