

Trans Fats: The Hidden Poison in our Food

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BACKGROUND

One of the FaN project's interventions was the upgrade of the laboratory at Jamaica's Bureau of Standards and Scientific Research Council. This has created, for the first time, the ability for Jamaica to test for sugar, salt and fat content of foods. Tests were done on packaged food products in Jamaica, and trans fat results were alarming:

- Trans fat was present in 39.5% of samples, 36.4% of which were "Made in Jamaica" (though most of the raw materials came from overseas).
- Of the samples labelled as "zero trans fat", 41.2% were found positive and 9.7% had concentrations >2% of total fat.
- 45% of the food samples contained saturated fat, which contributed more than 30% of total fat.

SO WHAT REALLY IS TRANS FAT?

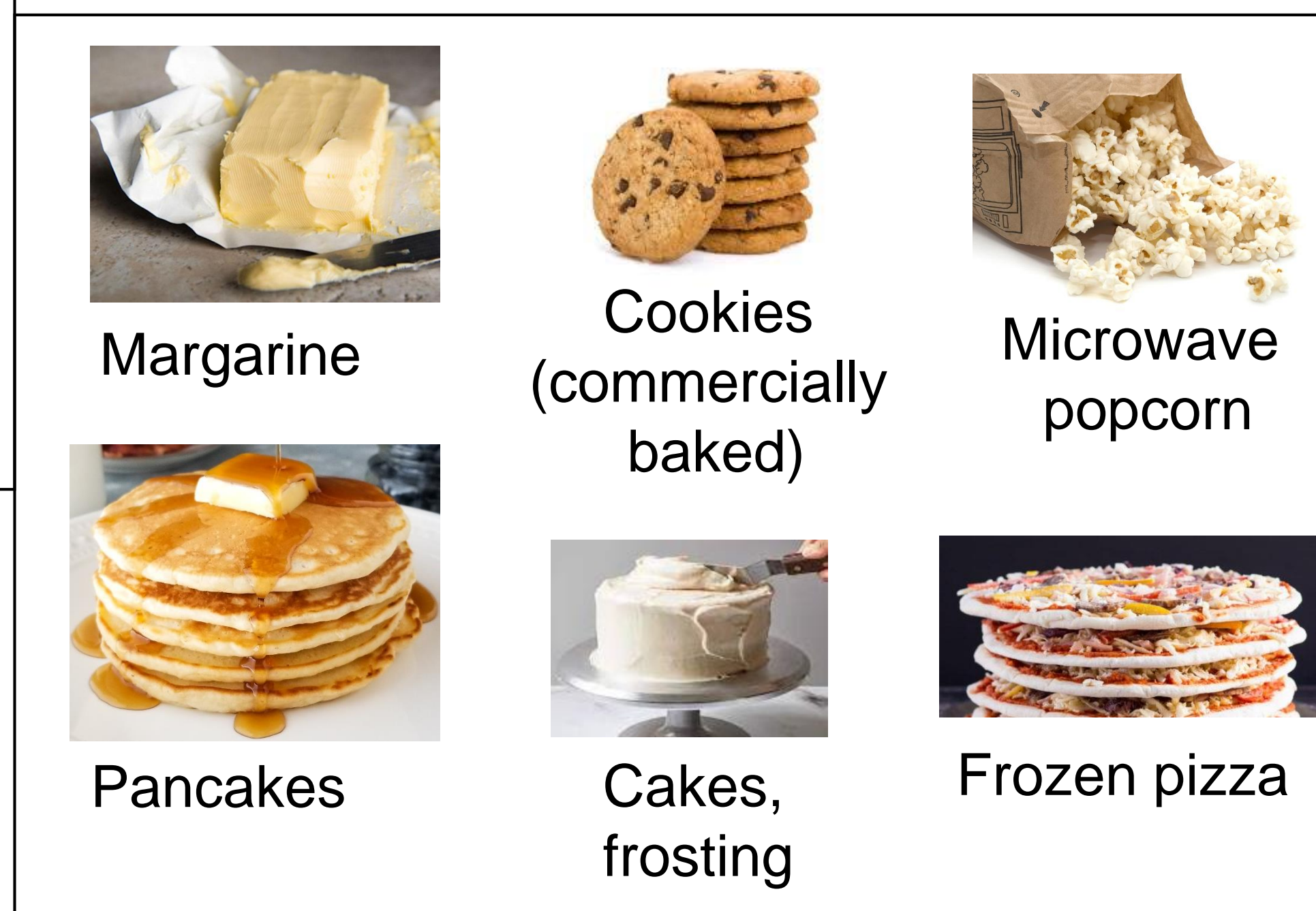
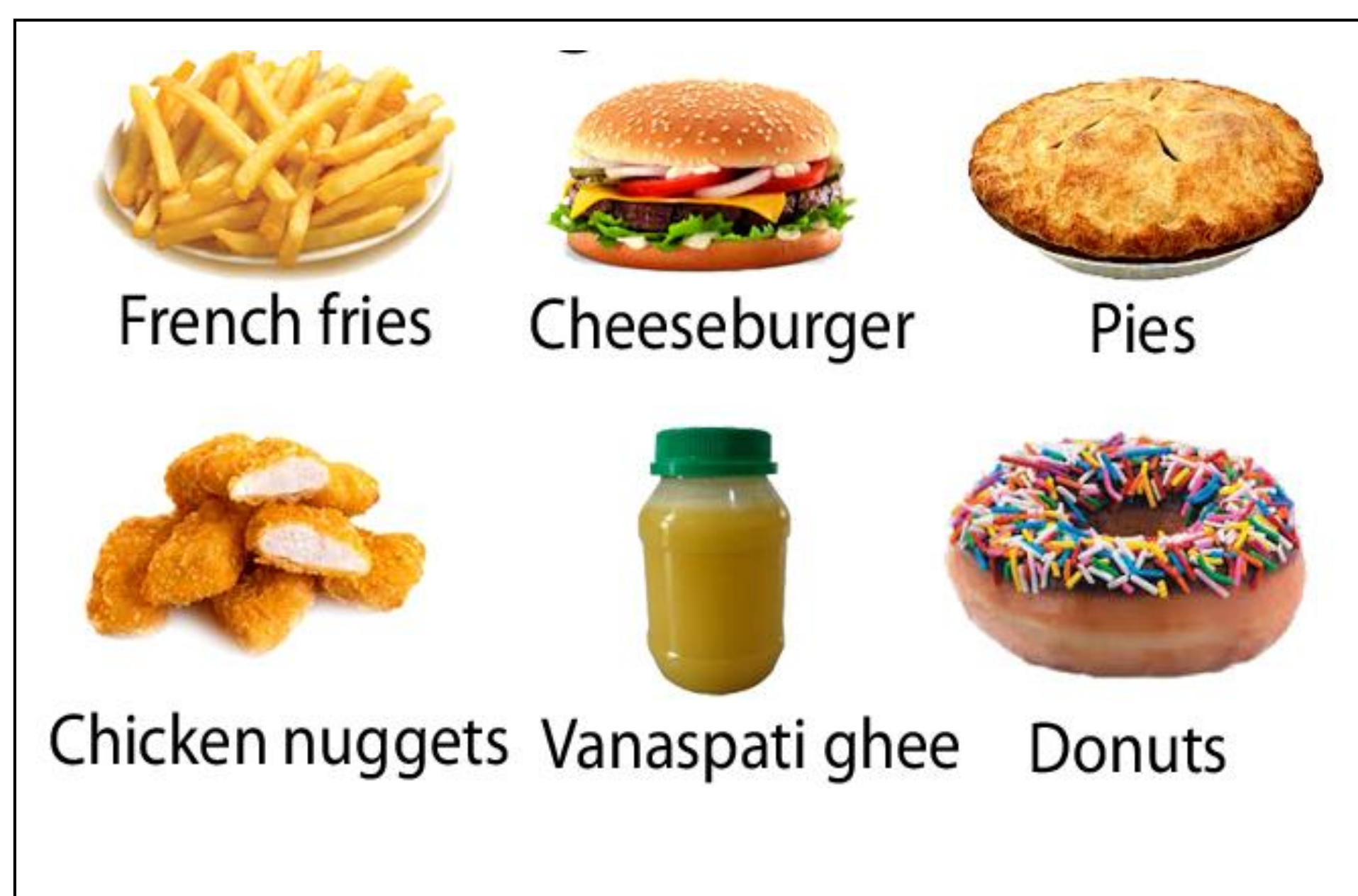
Trans fats are cheap fillers which are added to foods to increase bulk and shelf-life. They are created by adding hydrogen to liquid oils. The majority (80%) of trans fats are industrially-produced and have no nutritional value.

BUT WHY IS TRANS FAT SO BAD?

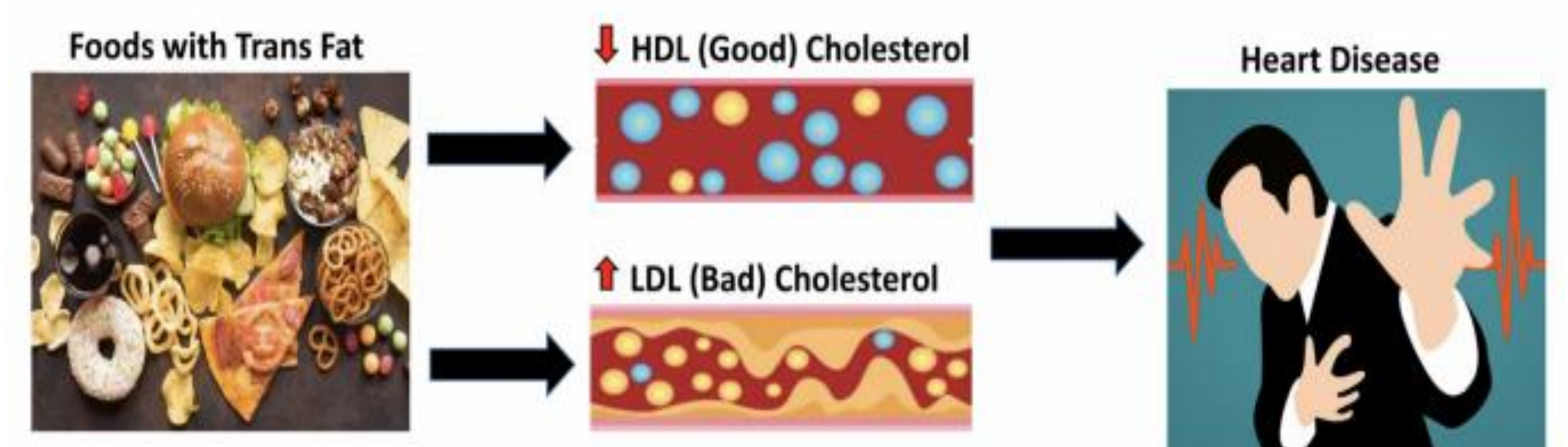
Industrially-produced trans fat reduces the body's good cholesterol (HDL) and increasing its BAD cholesterol (LDL). LDL deposits on the walls of your arteries causing them to harden and narrow. This leads to heart disease, stroke, diabetes, depression, Alzheimer's disease, and reduced mental performance.

These hidden trans fats in foods can add up quickly, even if you eat only small amounts in different foods.

Foods high in trans fat:



Trans fat and health:



• Trans fat increases LDL cholesterol, reduces HDL cholesterol, and increases risk of heart disease

WELL, WHAT CAN WE DO?

1. National legislation to ban industrially-produced trans fat: The World Health Organization recommends all countries to be trans fat free by 2023. CARICOM Heads of Government in 2007 called for "elimination of trans fats from the diet of our citizens".
2. Check food labels and avoid foods that contain trans fat
3. Consume foods that contain healthy fats: These are monounsaturated fats, such as Jamaican ackees, fish, nuts, avocados, olive oil, peanut oil and canola oils.
4. Promote graphic front-of-package labels: These can clearly show us which products have this hidden poison in our foods.

