

Family Chiropractic

*Courtesy of Harbourfront Family Chiropractic
by Dr. Warren Gage*



Great debate: margarine or butter?

What is better for your health – margarine or butter?
Let's start with a little history here.

Margarine was first “manufactured” (that should tell you something right there!) in 1870, in response to Napoleon's request for a cheaper alternative to butter, due to the European cattle plague. It was made from ingredients that included beef fat, milk, sheep's stomachs and cows' udders – mixed together and solidified using heat, pressure and lye. It appealed to the poor because it was much cheaper than butter.

Later, in the 1920's, vegetable oils became the major ingredient in margarine because they were less expensive than meat and dairy products. And then, food scientists added all kinds of chemical agents to improve margarine's look, taste, and spread-ability and the color changed from its original white to yellow to resemble butter the appearance of butter.

People began to buy margarine, not only because it was less expensive than butter, but also because they were led to believe it was healthier. Butter contains a lot of saturated fat and cholesterol, two key factors that contribute to heart disease, heart attacks and strokes. Here lies the beginning of the debate ... although most people prefer the taste of butter they think that margarine is healthier for them.

Noted health and wellness expert, Dr. Andrew Weil claims that high fat diets are the cause of premature death and that fat should take up no more than 20 per cent of your daily caloric intake. Dr. Weil advises that one way to cut out fat from your diet is to eliminate both butter and margarine and learn to enjoy the taste of food without them!

He also points out that, although unsaturated oils go into making margarine, the process that solidifies these oils saturates them. So, even though margarine contains no cholesterol, the health benefits of using it instead of butter are overrated.

The most important difference between the two, according to Dr. Weil, is the type of fatty acids in each. The fatty acids in butter closely resemble the fatty acids in our own bodies. The oils used to make margarine are processed into unnatural fatty acids (trans-fats). Trans-fats increase your risk for cancer and inflammation, hasten the aging process, and cause changes in your body tissue at the cellular level.

Dr. Weil's advice? Avoid both as much as you can, but when you just have to have a spread – eat butter (in moderation of course!)

A few other key facts: margarine lowers immune system response, negatively affects the quality of breast milk, increases total cholesterol (lowers good HDL cholesterol and raises bad LDL cholesterol), and decreases the body's insulin response, which raises the risk for diabetes.

Oh...and when left out on the table or counter, flies and insects will often steer clear of margarine! What does that tell you?