

Butter or margarine

which is better?

The long discussion continues on whether you should eat margarine or butter.

Margarine was originally manufactured to fatten turkeys. It was not as popular as had been anticipated with these birds. To increase its appeal a yellow colouring was added to it to make it look like butter. Since the early days some clever new flavourings have been added to it.

What is the difference between margarine and butter?

Butter has been around for centuries, whereas margarine has only been around for about 145 years. Both have the same amount of calories. Butter is higher in saturated fats at 8 grams, compared to 5 grams for margarine.

Butter arguably tastes better, increases the absorption of some nutrients in other foods and has more nutritional benefits than margarine; however, margarine, being softer, may be easier to use. There have been decades of government health advice, particularly in regard to heart disease, cholesterol levels and the consumption of fats and oils, that eating butter is not healthy. This made a number of people switch to margarine.

Margarine is higher in trans fatty acids, is a highly synthetic product with additives and cheap, low-grade oils refined on an industrial scale.

In Ayurvedic terms butter is thought to be a healthier food than margarine as it has more nutritional value. It is given in extra doses to those who want to increase weight as it is a kapha-increasing food.

In Ayurveda it is thought that there are three energies in foods: vata, pitta and kapha. Kapha foods are those with the heavier elements of water and earth and consequently help put on weight. Vata foods have the lightest elements of air and space and would be more suitable if you wanted to lose weight while pitta energy foods have the medium elements but also the fierier element of fire and some water in them.

According to a recent Harvard medical study, eating margarine can increase heart disease in women by 53% compared to those eating the same amount of butter. This can significantly increase the risk of coronary heart disease and increase total cholesterol and LDL (this is the bad cholesterol) and lower HDL cholesterol (the good cholesterol). Margarine is also thought to increase the risk of cancers by up to five times and decrease immune response.



Reanalysing a study originally carried out in the late sixties and early seventies, scientists have confirmed that margarine is not better for you than butter. The scientific evidence is compelling and totally at odds with decades of official advice that we should be cutting down on eating animal fats.

Fats in butter have already been identified as key components of cell membranes, essential for the production of certain hormones, and have an important role to play in the transport and absorption of certain vitamins and minerals.

Some scientists have claimed that butter is not healthy as it contains saturated fat. However, it is the sort of cholesterol that is vital for brain and nervous system development and has various natural compounds with anti-fungal, anti-oxidant

and even anti-cancer properties.

Margarine manufacturers of so-called cholesterol-busting spreads use plant chemicals – sterols and stanols – to reduce cholesterol levels, but they do so at a time when long-held beliefs on cholesterol are beginning to look as doubtful as those about saturated fats.

There are also hybrid spreads, butter mixed with a little vegetable oil. These may be conveniently spreadable. However, for most of the year, butter is spreadable when kept at room temperature in a good, old-fashioned butter dish.

Overall, butter in moderation is a better choice compared to margarine. It has more advantages over margarine, but ultimately people quite often decide on taste, price and convenience. **CHW**

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