

Consumer health: Butter, margarine and your heart

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March is National Nutrition Month, which makes this a good time to take a look at butter, margarine and heart health.

Butter is a dairy product, made from the milk or cream of cows. Margarine is made from vegetable oil. They may look similar and be used similarly for baking or cooking, but when it comes to heart health, that's where the similarities end.

Butter is made from animal fat, so it contains more saturated fat. Eating saturated fat can raise your [cholesterol level](#). Your body needs cholesterol to build [healthy cells](#), but high levels of cholesterol can increase your risk of heart disease.

Margarine contains unsaturated polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats. These types of fats reduce [low-density lipoprotein](#), or LDL or "bad," cholesterol when substituted for saturated fat.

But not all margarines are created equal. Some margarines contain transfat, which is considered the worst type of fat you can eat. Unlike other dietary fats, transfat raises your LDL cholesterol and also lowers your [high-density lipoprotein](#), or HDL or "good," cholesterol. A diet laden with transfats also increases your risk of heart disease, as well as stroke and Type 2 diabetes.

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