

SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

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UT SOUTHWESTERN STUDY CONFIRMS THAT SUBSTITUTING REGULAR MARGARINE FOR BUTTER REDUCES CHOLESTEROL LEVELS

DALLAS – Dec. 6, 2000 – Substituting margarine for butter reduces “bad” cholesterol – called low-density lipoproteins (LDL) – in adults and children, according to researchers at UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas.

The study, published in today’s issue of *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, involved 46 families. It confirmed that a margarine-based diet is healthier and may reduce heart-disease risk compared to a butter-based diet, said Dr. Margo Denke, associate professor of internal medicine and senior author of the study.

The study showed that adult study participants’ LDL cholesterol levels were reduced by 11 percent (9 percent in children) when a margarine-based, cholesterol-lowering diet was followed. The “good” cholesterol, called high-density lipoproteins (HDL), remained constant.

“Consumers should take this study as another confirmation that regular tub margarine is better for you than butter,” Denke said.

For some time, Denke said, consumers have not known which to choose – margarine or butter – because of concerns over trans-fatty acids found in some types of margarine.

Trans-fatty acids are formed when liquid oils are converted into a semi-solid fat, which is more convenient to spread. Ten years of research has proven that trans-fatty acids raise LDL cholesterol levels. This research, she said, has pushed some consumers to choose butter over margarine.

“But choosing butter instead of margarine is not a healthy choice. Butter contains far more saturated fatty acids than margarine, and butter is, therefore, a potent cholesterol-raising fat,” Denke said.

The tub margarine used in the study contained only 7 percent trans-fatty acids, which is typical of most tub margarines.

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The families followed a margarine-based diet for five weeks. They then switched to a butter-based diet for a period of five weeks. The participants consumed specially formulated breads, cookies and other products made with either regular tub margarine or butter.

Because the study involved families, the researchers also looked at why some individuals respond more positively to a cholesterol-lowering diet. They found that shared genes and environment play a role.

“Although differences in response to diet were observed, 80 percent of participants lowered their LDL cholesterol level on the margarine-based diet compared to the butter diet,” said Denke, who is a senior investigator in the Center for Human Nutrition.

Choosing a cholesterol-lowering diet has been a longtime recommendation of health-care professionals in an effort to curb the incidence of coronary heart disease – the leading cause of death in America.

“High cholesterol levels work over decades to cause heart disease,” Denke said. “Children consuming diets high in saturated fat have higher cholesterol levels and more coronary artery plaque buildup than children on low saturated fat diets. A healthy diet has important long-term benefits.”

Other researchers on the study included Anh Nguyen, research assistant in the Center for Human Nutrition, and Beverley Adams-Huet, faculty associate in internal medicine.

The study was funded by the United Soybean Board, the National Association of Margarine Manufacturers, and the General Clinical Research Center at UT Southwestern.

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