

Butter is back

Scientific studies show emerging evidence that a lack of saturated fat may be damaging health

Butter is back in fashion and so are the saturated fats. The meta-analysis evaluating 72 different scientific studies, published in the Journal Annals of Internal Medicine (March 2014), found there is no evidence to support the claims that saturated fat increases the risk of heart disease and other cardiac events.

By Henk Hoogenkamp

There is an urgent need for a careful reappraisal of the current nutritional guidelines. There are simply too many conflicting publications that confuse consumers. Based on the new scientific findings it can be expected that the national committees on health guidelines will revisit the heart health issues and update its policies and stop demonising foods that contain saturated fat such as present in meat, milk and cheese.

In other words, there is no evidence that swapping saturated fats for foods with unsaturated fats lowers the risk of developing coronary heart disease and related ailments. (University of Cambridge/British Heart Foundation – Published in the Annals of Internal Medicine analysing 72 separate studies of more than 600,000 participants; March 2014).

“Mankind has to eat less meat but yet much better quality.”

On the contrary, there is emerging evidence that a lack of saturated fat may – in fact – be damaging. The meta-research study did not find that people who ate higher levels of saturated fat had more heart disease than those who consumed less. Even more remarkable, the meta-study did not find less disease in those eating higher amounts of

unsaturated fat, including mono-unsaturated fat like olive oil, or polyunsaturated fat like rice oil or sunflower oil.

The decline of margarine

At least dating back to the early 1970's, under the leadership of global giants of the margarine industry, has the consumer been bombarded with a never-ending barrage of propaganda about the ill effects of animal fat. The same margarine industry conveniently

forgot to inform the consumer that much of the non-saturated fat was in the form of transfat, and that most of the polyunsaturated fats were in fact chemically extracted oils. Never mind that – as a result – new foods reached the shopping baskets that were hyper-processed containing a long list of additives to allow a transformation of natural to the “new healthy”. Actually, the arrival of these so-called “healthy” but over-processed margarine

spreads in the 1970's is probably the single most important factor to the current obesity crisis crippling a large number of people around the world.

For years, governments and self-interest groups and companies have criticised consumption of saturated fat while trying to implement favourable guidelines to increase consumption of mono/

polys-saturated fats. These guidelines date back to 1984 when the Committee on Medical Aspects of Food Policy recommended men to consume no more than 30g a day and women no more than 20g a day.

Despite the fact that Unilever criticised butter in the past, a fundamental change in strategy welcomed back real butter in their margarine spreads such as Rama. Unilever Germany can be commended for taken the initiative to blend real butter with

The road ahead

The meat and dairy industry should not rejoice and celebrate the newfound scientific belief that consuming saturated fat is OK. Although that might be true, the animal protein industry should seriously consider if their unrelenting drive to increase high intensity animal harvest production is something that will go hand in hand with increased use of antibiotics and hormones, not to mention the damage to the

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margarine (8% butter + 92% margarine) in order to reverse its declining sales of margarine. Of course, Unilever's objectives are not health related but only driven to address the high expectations of its customers who want to enjoy the taste of the real thing again.

Per capita butter consumption is at a 45-year high in 2014, while margarine is at a 70-year low (USDA 2014 data). While the margarine industry was occupied pushing the heart-health advantages of these spreadable fats and oils, the perception of the consumer changed and now sees margarine as over-processed, artificial, cheap, and unhealthy. This remarkable change is reflected in Germany where butter outsells margarine by a three-to-one margin. The German margarine sales have declined for seven straight years, and clearly powerhouse Unilever was forced to revive their sagging business. Adding back butter – the natural goodness of mother nature – recreated a creamier and better-tasting product.

environment and catastrophic overuse of chemicals, fertilisers, soil and water. The costs associated with pushing milk and meat production to unsustainable levels are demonstrable and huge.

Now that it has been confirmed that eating saturated fat is not bad for a body, modern mankind has come to a critical junction to eat less meat but yet much better quality, including more humane treatment of animals and less focused on yield and reaching unsustainable high production levels.



Henk W. Hoogenkamp

is a publicist and author, and has previously been President of DMV USA (now Friesland Campina), and Senior Director Strategic Technology, Solae LLC, (a DuPont Company).

Author's address
Henk W. Hoogenkamp,
hoogenkamp1@aol.com