

Startling new facts on the dangers of margarines

Margarine is bad for you and that's official. According to research carried out by Harvard University, margarine is more likely to lead to heart disease than butter or vegetable oils used in a well-balanced diet.

The core of the problem is the process used to convert vegetable oils to margarine called 'hydrogenation' which changes the nature of the oils, creating 'trans fats'. These are chemically different from the small amounts of trans fats that are found naturally in some foods, including butter. The Harvard study monitored

the food intake and medical record of 85,000 nurses over an eight-year period (reported in The Lancet medical journal, March, 1993) and found a strong link between higher intake of artificial trans fats and heart disease. The scientists involved in the study estimate that trans fats contribute to 30,000 deaths from heart disease in the USA alone every year.

LABELLING

The results of the Harvard study would suggest that it is definitely best to avoid foods containing trans fats. Until recently, artificial trans fats

were not a significant part of people's daily diets, but now they are found in white bread, biscuits, cake and doughnuts. The tell-tale word to look for on food labels is 'hydrogenated', although some manufacturers just include the word 'fats' to cover all fats in the product.

SAFER ALTERNATIVES

As an alternative to margarine, butter used in moderation as part of a well-balanced diet seems less harmful. Vegetable oils in their natural state are another option. The best are natural cold-pressed oils, available from healthfood shops and some

supermarkets. Cold-pressed oils, used in moderation, are valuable sources of the essential oils necessary for good health.

REVERSING HEART DISEASE

For those particularly at risk from heart disease, a new approach has been developed that can partially reverse clogging of the arteries without the use of drugs or surgery. Research carried out by Dr. Dean Ornish in the United States (also reported in The Lancet) suggests that the intake of fats should be less than 10% of total calories. This effectively rules out margarines because almost all of the calories from

'low-fat' spreads or hard margarines come from fats. The small amount of fat allowed on the programme comes from the natural fat content of cereals and vegetables rather than from added oils or fats.

The results of the Harvard study could be bad news for the food industry, which for years has been promoting margarine and 'low-fat' spreads as the healthy alternative to butter. In the light of the findings it would seem paradoxical that a major margarine manufacturer would be so closely linked to the Irish Heart Foundation's Happy Heart Campaign.

NEWS ITEMS

Best Exercise

Moderate exercise proved better than more vigorous activity in a study reported in the British Medical Journal. The nine-year study of nearly 8000 middle-aged men found that moderate exercise cut the risk of stroke by 40% compared with that of sedentary subjects. Vigorous exercise cut stroke risk by even more (70%) but the hard trainers had slightly more risk of heart attack than the moderate exercisers.

Cholesterol Cutter

Want to lower your cholesterol? Eat more fruits and vegetables. The American Journal of Cardiology describes one study of men who ate a prudent diet with less than 30% of the calories from fat and no more than 300mg dietary cholesterol per day. The subjects were divided into two groups, with one group told to eat more fruits and vegetables while the other just stuck to the prudent diet. The men in the first group cut their cholesterol by 6.6% and their unhealthy low density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol by 7.3%. Researchers felt that soluble fibres and/or the antioxidants found in fruits and vegetables might account for the healthful decline in cholesterol.

Massage for Premature Babies

Premature babies are getting the loving touch - professionally. A new project in Whipps Cross Hospital's Special Care Baby Unit in North London has pioneered massage



for premature babies. The nursing staff have found that around 90% of babies respond well, becoming calm and relaxed and that heart rate falls and oxygen uptake increases.

When a man loves a woman

The shape of modern woman has changed dramatically over the past 25 years. The famous 'hour glass' figure of the voluptuous Marilyn Monroe was once seen by men as the perfect female shape. Today we have a range of shapes from the ultra thin waif-like of Kate Moss to the stylish model looks of Cindy Crawford to the muscular look of Sandy Rydel.

We put the question to the men on the street as to what or who is their ideal female. We got some interesting reactions to the two photographs of Cindy Crawford and the female bodybuilder. Many men felt that Cindy Crawford was more feminine. Quite a large proportion of men interviewed disliked the physique of the bodybuilder. Reactions such as 'grotesque' or 'not feminine', 'didn't like it', 'it's not normal for women'. Cindy Crawford on the other hand was thought to be nice and natural. Martin Cherry, 32, Dublin was in awe of the bodybuilder's physique. He felt it was 'alright to work out, but here the feminine form is distorted. All you can see is muscles'. He was interested to see this woman's

shape, twenty years from now. "Could a body sustain such muscular development?". One gentleman however quite liked the picture of the female bodybuilder. He didn't find it repulsive at all, it was what you would expect from a bodybuilder. He appreciated that it takes hard work to get a body like this. He admired the bodybuilder's fine arms.

John aged 30, who is a hairstylist was full of praise for the photo of the bodybuilder. In his words "Wow - I'd love a body like that for myself - I prefer this photo to that of Cindy Crawford".

In contrast Tom Clarke who is in his 70's felt the picture of the bodybuilder is "ridiculous". His ideal kind of woman would be Grace Kelly.

Finally Glen, 15, disliked in particular the muscles of the female bodybuilder - he painted in a grimace to the outline and compared it to a skeleton.

So, it seems like when a man loves a woman that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Watch for the follow-up when we investigate what kind of male body women hold as their ideal - when a woman loves a man!



Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

Government's new health policy

Healthier living and preventative treatment have at last been made cornerstones in the government's new public health policy.

A new healthcare policy document, "Shaping a Healthier Ireland", which was launched by Health Minister Brendan Howlin earlier this year, has targeted the country's relatively high premature death rate. And it identifies the primary causes as lifestyle factors, such as:

- Smoking.
- Alcohol abuse.
- Inadequate nutrition and diet.
- Lack of exercise.
- High cholesterol levels.

While the report recognises the improvement in the general health of the population in recent years, it also emphasises the need to improve the quality of life. Holistic practitioners across



Brendan Howlin, Minister for Health

the country have welcomed the greater emphasis given to the educational and preventative approach, but many feel that their expertise

and methods could be used better by the government and official agencies. In Britain, for example, 35% of general practitioners refer patients to holistic medicine practitioners for stress control, massage, relaxation, nutrition, healing and osteopathic manipulation. A similar trend is evident in the United States, where recent research has shown that people are now consulting holistic practitioners more often than family doctors (see also story on page 14).

The Irish Association of Holistic Medicine, which represents the largest body of practising professionals in the country, has said it would like the Minister to recognise officially the value of holistic medicine and to officially encourage greater co-operation between conventional medicine and the holistic approach.

Healthy heart campaign

Tony Quinn has always had a great personal interest in the promotion of positive health as evidenced by his involvement in physical culture and yoga. This interest led him to found the Irish Health Culture Association in 1969. The Irish Health Culture Association is now the largest professional body in holistic therapy in Ireland, and retains as one of its basic objectives the provision of useful health information to the public.

This year, Tony Quinn and the Irish Health Culture Association instituted the Healthy Ireland Campaign. Its purpose is to bring research-based health information to the Irish public, in particular, information not readily available from other sources.

The first project chosen for the campaign was heart disease and featured the little-publicised (in Ireland at any rate) fact that heart disease can not only be prevented but actually reversed - clogged arteries, once thought to be irrevocably damaged, can be

opened up again by a specific combination of diet and lifestyle factors. This was shown in ground-breaking research published by Dr. Dean Ornish in 1990, and since then his original findings have been confirmed and vindicated with the completion of the full four years of the unique Lifestyle Heart Project.

A detailed summary of this heart disease reversal programme has been published in leaflet form by the Healthy Ireland Campaign together with diet notes and recipes suitable for the very-low-fat diet which the programme entails. This leaflet is being distributed through Health Culture practitioners and via on-street campaigns in major cities and towns. Copies are available from:

The Healthy Ireland Campaign, Tony Quinn Centre, 66, Eccles Street, Dublin 7. Tel: (01) 830 4686.



Exercise vs. Cancer

More good news for athletes: Regular exercise appears to cut the risk of colon cancer in half. The Journal for the National Cancer Institute tells of a 30-year study of 17,148 Harvard alumni. The men who were highly active, burning more than 2,500 calories a week in exercise (walking, stair-climbing and sports), had only half the risk of developing colon cancer as their sedentary contemporaries, who did less than 1,000 calories worth of exercise per week.

Too Much Tea

Drinking too much tea can interfere with your body's absorption of iron, says a newsletter from the University of California. "One study showed that drinking tea with a meal decreases iron absorption by 62%". Adding milk to the tea doesn't affect the process, but adding lemon juice improves iron absorption (because Vitamin C increases iron absorption).