

Trans fats backlash pushes US butter consumption to a 40-year-high

January 13 2014, by David Pierson

For generations, butter got a bad rap. It was thought to be cloying, fattening, dangerous for your arteries, and it took a creaming from oil-based substitutes like margarine.

Now with the [trans fats](#) in those alternatives under fire, everyone from iron chefs to home cooks are re-examining butter's place on the refrigerator shelf.

The yellow spread served at Joan Hemphill's Seal Beach home tastes like butter - because it is butter.

"I use way too much," Hemphill concedes. Her specialty is butter-drenched caramelized baby onions. "I just think anything from nature is better than something that's been concocted."

That shift toward natural ingredients and the backlash against trans fats pushed butter consumption in the United States to a 40-year high in 2012, according to the latest statistics.

Americans now eat 5.6 pounds of butter per capita, up from a low of 4.1 pounds in 1997. In the last decade alone, butter consumption has grown 25 percent.

"Everything tastes better with butter," said David Riemersma, president of the American Butter Institute and head of Butterball Farms in Grand Rapids, Mich. "Consumers also want real, natural wholesome products.

They want to understand all the things on an ingredient list. Butter fits perfectly. It's either just cream or cream and salt."

The American Butter Institute, a trade association in Arlington, Va., that represents roughly 90 percent of the nation's butter producers, recently launched a marketing campaign on social media called "Go Bold with Butter." The group sees young Americans raised on the Food Network as key to the industry's continued success.

"They're just starting to cook and bake with butter," Riemersma said.

The growing popularity of the ingredient also coincides with more understanding about the health hazards of its processed counterparts.

Trans fats are vegetable oils that have been blended with hydrogen to boost shelf life and reproduce the qualities of butter or lard. But research shows the ingredient raises levels of LDL cholesterol, also known as bad cholesterol. Trans fats consumption impairs levels of the better HDL cholesterol, which helps prevent heart disease.

The Food and Drug Administration proposed new rules in November that would all but ban the artery-clogging processed fats. Some producers of butter-like spreads have already adapted. Unilever, the maker of Country Crock margarine, eliminated trans fats from its products in 2012.

Still, even healthier margarine will struggle to stand out in a nation increasingly captivated by foodie culture. Butter has become a symbol of America's growing appreciation of authentic cooking and its fascination with gluttony.

Consumers now represent a faster-growing category for butter sales than food manufacturers, which are working hard to take advantage of that

demand by labeling their cookies and frozen pies as "made with real butter."

Riemersma said his privately owned butter company, Butterball Farms (not to be confused with the turkey brand), has enjoyed double-digit growth in recent years, boosted by innovations such as butters flavored with cinnamon or garlic.

Despite butter's relative benefits compared with alternatives, it's not health food. In a word, butter is fat - and not the good kind. It's loaded with saturated fat, which has been linked to heart disease.

The American Heart Association recommends limiting saturated fats to less than 7 percent of a person's daily calorie intake. That means just a few pats of butter can put you over the limit.

Butter was far more popular in the early half of the last century. Per-capita consumption was more than 18 pounds as late as 1934 before the Great Depression, World War II and margarine changed the nation's eating habits.

Back then, few Americans were likely eating dishes as refined as artichoke hearts braised in butter and white wine. Celebrated chef Michael Cimarusti serves that dish alongside fish at his highly rated Hollywood restaurant Providence.

His more casual seafood restaurant in West Hollywood, Connie and Ted's, serves another buttery crowd pleaser: piping-hot rolls baked and served in a cast iron pan, topped with a salty butter from Vermont that's been cultured for its depth of flavor.

"I never felt pressure in L.A., even as a health conscious city, to eschew butter," Cimarusti said. "In moderation and used smartly you can achieve

things you can't with other fats."

Cimarusti has dined on some of the world's most exquisite delicacies. But he said nothing beats rich [butter](#) softened to room temperature and spread on warm, crunchy toast.

"It's one of life's simple pleasures," he said. "It's a beautiful way to start the day, something you can't get from Country Crock."

©2014 Los Angeles Times
Distributed by MCT Information Services

Citation: Trans fats backlash pushes US butter consumption to a 40-year-high (2014, January 13)
retrieved 8 May 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-01-trans-fats-backlash-butter-consumption.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--