



Cooperative Extension Service

College of Agriculture

Sheridan County Office

224 S. Main, Suite B-10 • Sheridan, WY 82801

(307) 674-2980 • fax (307) 675-2988 • ces.uwyo.edu



Fats & Oils: Health & Safety

Butter or margarine, which oil should I be cooking with, how long will this stay *good*??? Do you find yourself confused about the multitude of fats and oils available at grocery stores? You're not alone. All of the choices available today are enough to confound even the most experienced of shoppers. The following information should (hopefully) help to clear up a few of these questions.

The first issue I'll tackle is a battle that has been fought for decades: margarine or butter? Butter is quite high in saturated (bad) fat, but some traditional stick margarines still contain *trans* (really bad) fat, and some of the newer soft margarines boast of their healthful fat profiles and 'light' varieties. So what's in my refrigerator? Usually some butter and a tub margarine (with no *trans* fats)—either is really an acceptable choice as long as you remember to enjoy them in moderation (remember that skinny slice of the food pyramid?).

Note: deep-fried butter (winner of 'Most Creative' at the Texas State Fair last year) is probably pushing the limits of moderation.

Choosing a cooking oil can be a tricky matter as well. While most experts agree that olive and canola oils are great all-around choices for health, it may be good to keep a couple of other oils around for specific applications. If so, do your best to choose those higher in unsaturated fats. And if you don't particularly like the flavor of olive oil look for the 'extra-light' versions.

Food safety is an entirely different subject when an oil enters the conversation. While most food safety is concerned with foodborne illness (certainly no small matter), the use of hot oils in the kitchen creates the potential for certain heat and fire injuries. In fact, research by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission has found that over half of range or stove fires occurred when someone was frying, and one in seven home fires started with fat or grease.

To reduce your risk of injury don't over-fill pans when frying, always keep a close eye on your stovetop, and keep water away from your hot oil. These are lessons you don't want to learn the hard way! As far as storage goes, most oils should be kept in a cool, dark pantry, and can be stored up to a year. Butter and margarine may be kept up to 9 months in the refrigerator. If you are looking for a shelf-stable product for emergency use there are dry forms of butter that may be purchased.

As I hinted at earlier (and you may have heard before), moderation is the key. Most fats and oils can be enjoyed as long as they are playing a supporting role in your diet. *Kentz Willis, M.S., is the University Extension Educator in Nutrition and Food Safety for Sheridan and Johnson counties. He can be reached via email at kwillis3@uwyo.edu.*