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U.S. Gov. Report Says Margarine Over Butter

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The newest guidelines from the government's National Cholesterol Education Program (NCEP) state that health-conscious consumers should select softer margarines (liquid products) over butter for use as a table spread. . . executive summary of the new guidelines was published in the May 16 issue of the Journal of the American Medical Association.

NCEP's "Third Report of the NCEP Expert Panel on Evaluation, and Treatment of High Blood Cholesterol in Adults," also known as Adult Treatment Panel (ATP) III, is the first major update from NCEP in nearly a decade. NCEP is coordinated by the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI), which develops new guidelines as warranted by research advances. Earlier guidelines, issued in 1988 and 1993, contained similar recommendations for table spreads.

"We were understandably pleased that these latest guidelines confirm what our research has demonstrated for years -- that margarine products are much more healthy than butter," says Sue Taylor, R.D., director of nutrition communications for the National Association of Margarine Manufacturers.

The new guidelines also allow up to 35 percent of daily calories from total fat to be provided most is from unsaturated fat, which doesn't raise cholesterol level. In an accompanying editorial, two JAMA editors write: "The cholesterol hypothesis is no longer a hypothesis. There is no doubt that abnormal cholesterol levels cause morbidity and mortality and that aggressive treatment saves lives."

