Best Fats or Oils?

What fats or oils are the best for me to use? I am trying to improve my family’s diet by methodically implementing changes in what I buy.

You are the kind of mom who is so wise by making incremental changes that your family will hardly notice, yet will do them so much good.

First, with fats and oils, remember we don’t need much of them. They are high in calories but do carry fat-soluble vitamins. Most of our foods have fats as a part of their composition, so we don’t have to use much additional oil or fat to get enough. A little oil, however, can greatly enhance the palatability of our foods. In the fast-food arena, though, most of us have major health problems because of the high intake and content of fats.

Some of the most healthful fat is found in the nuts, avocados, legumes, and grains we eat. The eating of unprocessed foods permits us a balanced fat intake, but a little additional oil or fat is not unhealthful.

We suggest you first stop purchasing any butter at all. It is a saturated fat, hard on your blood vessels, and no longer the only spread for your bread. Select a margarine very carefully, being sure to avoid those that contain partially hydrogenated fats, which are fats that have been spoiled by processing them. Also, avoid any that contain trans fats. Margarines that are healthful are available, but you should be sure to check the labels.

Considerable debate still goes on about the correct balance between the Omega 6 and Omega 3 fatty acids. When a lot of debate exists, it means the evidence is not convincing. Omega 6 fatty acids are preponderate in oils such as sunflower, peanut, and corn oils. Omega 3 fatty acids are preponderate in flax seed oils, walnut oils, and fish oils. Olive oil doesn’t fit in either group, but is healthful. Also healthful is canola oil—much maligned by those who confuse it with an engine lubricant. The secret is to use only small amounts. Two tablespoons would represent a full day’s requirement, and because we tend to consume high-fat diets, we should be careful. We should probably obtain no more than 25 percent of our daily calories from fat sources. This means watching dairy products carefully. Low-fat varieties are the best kind to select.

Use a little olive oil or flax seed oil on your salads, and don’t become so rigid you don’t use a little oil in your cooking. Folk may not be willing to tell you, but some of those dishes are tasteless!

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While this column is provided as a service to our readers, Drs. Landless and Handysides unfortunately cannot enter into personal and private communication with our readers. We recommend that you consult with your personal physician on all matters of your health.