Switch to healthier fats

With the ban on trans fats taking effect in June 2020, consumers can look forward to wider usage of healthier options, such as olive oil, soybean oil and canola oil.

Even fat in the long term is associated with increased risk of developing heart disease, cancer and other chronic diseases. Among fats, saturated and trans fats are the worst culprits as they can promote the formation of cholesterol plaque in the arteries, which may lead to heart attacks and strokes.

Two new molecules have been identified that are associated with lower risk of heart disease. These are omega-3 fatty acids, which are found in fish and nuts, and unsaturated fats, which are found in vegetable oils. These fats are essential nutrients that are important for maintaining healthy arteries and reducing inflammation.

The key is to balance the intake of healthy fats with other nutrients such as carbohydrates and proteins. A healthy diet should include a variety of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean meats and nuts. It is recommended that individuals limit their intake of saturated fats and trans fats to less than 10% of their total daily calories.

The Singapore Nutrition Society recommends a daily intake of 0.6 to 1.0% of total energy from saturated fats and up to 3% of total energy from trans fats. This is equivalent to about 20g/day of saturated fats and 10g/day of trans fats. A balanced diet is essential to maintaining good health and preventing chronic diseases.

Even if a product states that it has low trans fats, consumers should still check if the list of ingredients contains partially hydrogenated oils or hydrogenated fats. These fats are used to extend shelf life and improve texture, but they can also increase the risk of heart disease.

Cooking oils and spreads are available in a variety of options, such as olive oil, canola oil, sunflower oil and peanut oil, which are all lower in saturated fats and trans fats. Some spreads are also fortified with omega-3 fatty acids from fish oil.

It is important to read labels carefully and choose products that are high in unsaturated fats and low in saturated fats. This will help reduce the risk of heart disease and maintain overall health.