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How to Better Your Life with Butter
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Note to Readers: *This free e-newsletter, sent only upon request, comes from Dr. Kathleen Begley, owner of Write Company Plus communications training. She writes weekly on topics connected to business and personal success. Dr. Begley recently launched a new blog called "Meandering to a Different Drummer." Click onto the website address at the end of this article to read her one-paragraph musings on life, death, and how to communicate as well as your dog.*

If you're one of the millions of Americans who have visited Ireland, I bet you returned with a classic souvenir: rosary beads from the Connemara Peninsula, a peat bog from Donegal Town, a pot of shamrocks from Tralee, a fake piece of the Blarney Stone from Cork, a crystal vase from Waterford, or, if you enjoy an occasional tippie, a quart of Jameson whiskey from Dublin. Like most tourists, you probably spent your entire duty-free-goods limit on decorative items that will sit temporarily on your mantel until they attain permanent residency in your attic.

Not me. Whenever leaving Ireland, where my parents were born, I buy butter. Yes, butter. Lots and lots of butter. In Ireland, it's so fresh that you'd think the cow lived in the next pub. In reality, the difference in taste is that European butter is about 85 percent butterfat – five points higher than that sold in the United States. On my last visit to Eire, I bought several pounds of the creamy delicacy at Shannon Airport. It never had a chance of going into storage anywhere but in my stomach.

To say I have a thing for butter is a vast understatement. My relationship is pure love-love. Simply put, one of my core beliefs is that butter is better than just about anything, especially that god-awful product known as margarine. At the risk of seeming obsessed, I confess that I have spent a great deal of my adulthood thinking about butter. Yes, I know I should get a life, but there it is. As a child of Irish immigrants, I used to think that the word "stick" referred to butter, not to part of a tree.

To be honest, in this Lipitor-driven society, I long have kept my fervor to myself. Even I have been reluctant to be regarded as a tub of lard, er, I mean butter. But I'm finally ready to admit my obsession. The reason for my sudden burst of honesty is the recent release of "Julie and Julia," a film depicting the life of the late French chef Julia Child. The Julie in the movie is a blogger who spent a year cooking and eating Child's recipes. To my knowledge, blood is still circulating freely through the writer's body.

Child, played in the film by actress Meryl Streep, was well known for the fat-filled recipes she made on her long-running television program airing for several decades beginning in the 1960's. Before her death at age 91 in 2004, cooking's pre-Rachel Ray darling frequently was quoted as saying "Oh, butter never hurts you." Note to heart surgeons: Ooopsie!

Sales of Child's book, "Mastering the Art of French Cooking," have skyrocketed since the debut of the movie. It's now showing everywhere with the exception, I presume, of hospital cardiology wards. Alfred A. Knopf, publisher of the 48-year-old tome, says it sold more copies during a recent weekend than in any full year since its original issue. Mais oui! How can you possibly resist running out to buy a book advising you to use butter to fry your bacon?

As I said earlier, butter has been my secret vice for many years, despite occasional psychic fears that I was on a slippery slide to Hollandaise and Bernaise sauces. Thank heaven I refused to listen to my dark side, except in the case of torching you-know-what and sugar for crême brulee.



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In case you believe the only thing you can do with butter is spread it on your pancakes, think again. Some ideas:

Read all about it. When I searched on my computer for butter, I came up with millions of hits. Among them was a lengthy article called “Butter Through the Ages” at www.webexhibits.org. Aimed at butterphiles like me, the document abounds with fascinating trivia. Did you know, for instance, that butter produced in the Philadelphia area in the later 19th century was so tasty that it sold for \$1 more a pound than butter from any other part of the nation? Obviously, there’s a reason that the place where I grew up is nicknamed the City of Butterly Love.

Consider flavors. Personally, I like plain butter. I can’t imagine anything being better than the salt-free variety produced by Land O Lakes. But no one is stopping you from adding garlic, chives, rosemary, or other flavorings. In the old days, farmers used to store butter in huge wooden vats called firkins, which imparted musky overtones. Funny, winemakers use the same technique on chardonnay.

Hold a tasting. Don’t laugh. Butter comes in a myriad of varieties beyond salted and unsalted. It even comes in three grades: AA, A, and B. The first type, which is not related to any self-help group for heavy drinkers, is the best. Invite the neighbors over to decide their favorites; promise to summon help quickly if your guests at any point feel chest pain shooting down their left arms. This sensation may mean that they should shift their heavy wine glasses to their right hands.

Think collectibles. Some people collect Hummel statuettes or Limoges figurines; I buy butter dishes. In my kitchen, I have almost a dozen such containers on display. I could have hundreds if I searched on E-Bay, but I prefer the thrill of randomly happening on butter crocks in culinary and department stores. One of my favorites depicts an Italian chef; his tall hat serves as the handle on the lid.

Present butter gifts. A lot of people give cheese, right? So what’s so strange about butter? Throw several pounds into a basket with chewy Portuguese rolls and Carr’s biscuits, and you’re all set. Speaking of set, make sure to keep the butter cold in transit so it doesn’t melt, which happens at temperatures above 65 degrees. Thirty degrees higher and it’s flowing like water.

Butter up your recipes.. Remember the bacon fried in butter? Well, how about slathering this year’s holiday turkey? Does the brand name Butterball ring a bell?

Use common sense. If your cholesterol hovers somewhere around 300, please disregard this entire column. Mine happens to be under 200, with a really healthy ratio of good to bad. Yet I have eaten butter on every baked good of my life. What can I tell you? I suspect my ability to consume fats without apparent health consequences is hereditary. My father, a loving man always eager to set a good example, went through a pound of butter every single adult week of his 89 years on this Earth. Thank you, Daddy.

Dr. Kathleen Begley has written seven books and gives corporate seminars on topics such as writing persuasively, presenting confidently, and managing positively. You can call her at 610-429-1562 or e-mail her at KBegley@writecompanyplus.com. She responds to everybody.