

# Professor calls for tax on 'poison' butter

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A top public health expert is calling for a health tax on butter, saying it's "pure, natural poison" and as bad as cigarettes.

New Zealanders eat more butter per head than any other nationality and Auckland University epidemiologist Professor Rod Jackson says that's why our cholesterol levels are also among the world's highest.

"We have a health tax on alcohol and cigarettes and there should be a health tax on butter. It's the most poisonous commonly consumed food in New Zealand. It's about the purest form of saturated fat you can eat and it has no protein and no calcium. Butter has had all the good things taken out and just left the poison."

Jackson was commenting ahead of this week's nationwide cholesterol testing programme being launched by the makers of Flora Pro-Activ cholesterol-lowering spread. Nurses in shopping malls will fingerprick test up to 10,000 people nationwide.

The scheme's critics say cholesterol can't be looked at in isolation as a risk factor and that the fingerprick test records only total cholesterol rather than its important components. But organisers say nurses will explain the importance of all risk factors and the aim is to get people to their GPs for a more comprehensive assessment.

New Zealanders get about 20 per cent of their saturated fat intake (and therefore bad cholesterol) from butter. We average around 8kg a year - three times as much as Australians and 16 times more than the Japanese.

Jackson says while the dairy industry had done some "fabulous" things to produce low-fat alternatives, "its one major weakness is butter". "If only they could find a nice effective process for turning butter into biofuel."

Jim Mann, professor in human nutrition at Otago University, said while a health tax on butter was a brilliant idea "it ain't going to happen - even a Labour government is never going to go there so it's not worth wasting emotional energy on."

Associate Health Minister Damien O'Connor said a health tax on butter would be naive and impractical, but said butter should be eaten in moderation.

The Flora Pro-Activ programme starts tomorrow. Details of malls involved are at [www.nztest.co.nz](http://www.nztest.co.nz).