

[food & health]

Contact us at foodandhealth@which.co.uk with your questions and opinions

round-up

● **Trans fats reduced**

Since our tests last year, Cadbury's has reduced trans fats in its Boost bar, and Marks & Spencer is due to phase them out from its foods. We've recently been joined by another 64 consumer groups from Europe and the US in our calls for an end to artificial trans fats in food. In the meantime, avoid foods that contain partially hydrogenated or hydrogenated fat.

● **Say no to sunbeds**

The World Health Organization has



recommended that people under 18 should not use sunbeds. UV damage in childhood (from sunbeds as well as the sun) increases the risk of developing malignant melanoma – the most dangerous form of skin cancer – later in life. Excess UV exposure can also cause skin ageing and eye damage.

● **Genes and diet**

Scientists are looking at how we respond to foods according to our genes. Nutrigenomics is in its infancy but we may soon see genetic tests that promise to tell you what to eat to stay healthy.

'FRESH' BREAD



The smell of freshly-baked bread in a supermarket is hard to resist – even for the most dedicated Atkins dieter – but it may become less appealing when you find out that some of the loaves you're smelling could be a year old.

Our investigation of the eight leading supermarket chains with in-store bakeries found that all of them use at least some loaves that have been part-baked or frozen. In some cases, the bread has been made and frozen as long as 12 months before it's finally cooked. Staff simply finish the loaves off in the in-store oven before putting them on the shelves.

Marks & Spencer's best-selling loaf, for example, is a baguette that's made in Paris and shipped to the UK part-baked. It can then be frozen for as long as six months, though M&S says that 'most of it is baked in store within a month'.

Asda, Morrisons, Somerfield, Sainsbury's and Tesco all told us that they also bake bread in store from scratch, unlike Marks & Spencer, Waitrose and Co-op, where none of the loaves is made entirely in store.

WHICH? WINS ON CARE HOMES

The Office of Fair Trading (OFT) has recommended a shake-up of the care home market following a Which? complaint. According to Gordon Lishman, Director of Age Concern: 'The system is in such a mess that thousands of people can't get the information they need at a very distressing time of life.' As well as a lack of information, the system of charging for care is complex and unfair.

The OFT recommendations include a 'one-stop shop' to provide information about care homes, fees and local

council payment systems. It's also pushing for results of care home inspections, along with details of substantiated complaints against the home, to be published online. And it recommends that all homes be required to give residents written contracts and price lists.

'This is a breakthrough in recognising that older people are consumers like anyone else,' says Gordon Lishman. Which? is now pushing for the government to implement the OFT's recommendations speedily and effectively.

YOUR FOOD QUESTIONS

Dietician Catherine Collins answers your food and nutrition queries.



Q What's the GI diet? Can it help me lose weight?

A The Glycaemic Index (GI) ranks foods by how the carbohydrates in them influence blood sugar. High-GI foods such as sugar, potatoes and white bread, rapidly increase blood sugar and are quickly cleared from the blood, leaving you feeling hungry. Foods with a low GI (such as beans, pulses and nuts) raise blood sugar more slowly, helping you feel full for longer. GI isn't related to calorie content. Butter and cheese, for example, are high in fat and calories but have a zero GI rating as they don't contain carbohydrates. The best way to lose weight is a calorie-controlled diet, though you could consider incorporating GI principles (see www.glycaemicindex.com).

Q Is it true that milk causes breast cancer?

A Recent scare stories are based on the fact that people with breast cancer often have high blood levels of IGF-1, a growth factor produced naturally in the body and also found in milk. As for other elements in milk, the calcium, vitamin D and conjugated linoleic acid (CLA) may help protect against cancer, while the high levels of saturated fat may increase risk. Overall, there seems no need for concern: a recent extensive review of the evidence shows no link between milk or other dairy foods and breast cancer.



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