

[food & health]

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

round-up

● Trans fats update

From next year, foods in the US must be labelled with the level of unhealthy trans fats. The US Food and Drugs Administration is working on an upper limit – likely to be 1g or 2g a day. Our tests last year found just one KFC meal of crispy strips and fries contained 4.4g. We're pleased that the UK's Food Standards Agency is pressing the EU to legislate so that trans fats will have to be labelled here, too.

● Cosmetic rules

We welcome plans to introduce new standards for cosmetic procedures such as chemical peels and Botox. Our undercover research last year revealed a worrying lack of safeguards, with several clinics making exaggerated claims and failing to explain risks. Dr Abu Mahfouz, who gave our researchers very poor advice, has now been struck off the General Medical Council (GMC) register.

● Checks on doctors

The GMC was due to introduce appraisals of doctors this month. But these are on hold, after criticism by the Shipman Inquiry that they wouldn't provide a thorough check on doctors' fitness to practise. The GMC and government are now assessing new ways to protect patients.

CUT-PRICE FRUIT & VEG

With the government urging us to eat more fruit and veg, it's good to see some supermarkets starting to focus on value instead of perfect-looking produce. Asda's new Smartprice range includes cheap fruit and veg, such as bananas at 65p per kg (9p cheaper than standard) and 500g of tomatoes for 68p (11p less than normal). Asda claims that quality isn't compromised, but that sizes may vary from the standard range.

The new Basics selection from Sainsbury's also includes economy packs of fruit and vegetables. Again, the difference lies in the looks. A spokesperson told us: 'Our Basics produce is just as good in flavour and ripeness as our standard range, but it may not meet the



same requirements in terms of size, shape or colour. For example, our cooking apples may have blemishes'. Basics bananas cost 99p for 1.5kg (12p less than standard), and 500g of mixed peppers is 99p (43p less).

Last year, we criticised supermarkets' slavish desire to achieve cosmetic perfection when picking fruit and veg. Relaxing these stringent requirements means that less fruit goes to waste, and that we can afford to eat more of it. We hope this trend becomes more widespread.

YOUR HEALTH QUESTIONS

GP Dr Naomi Craft answers your health queries. In July, we'll answer your questions about food and nutrition.



Q How useful are herbs for menopausal symptoms?

A Many people believe that herbal products, including dong quai, kava and ginseng, can reduce hot flushes. Red clover and black cohosh, which contain plant oestrogens, are also popular alternatives. However, research hasn't yet proved whether these herbs are effective. They may also have serious side effects: there are rare reports of liver damage caused by black cohosh, and concerns that it may harm breast tissue. Red clover can thin the blood, so is unsuitable for women taking warfarin. For more information, call the Menopause Amarant Trust helpline (01293 413000).

Q Is alcohol really as bad as smoking?

A According to recent research, excessive drinking is as harmful as smoking tobacco. Alcohol is linked to more than 60 diseases, including breast cancer and heart disease, and it's responsible for around 20,000 deaths a year. However, it's widely accepted that moderate drinking helps protect against heart disease and strokes. Healthy limits are less than 14 units a week for women and 21 units for men. One unit is 10g of alcohol – the amount in a standard pub measure of spirits, half a pint of normal strength beer, or a small (125ml) glass of 8% abv wine.

HEALTHIER CLEANING

Marks & Spencer's new 'Naturally Inspired' range of cleaning products is free from all 'chemicals of concern', including phthalates and artificial musks. Phthalates can cause kidney and liver damage and, like artificial musks, are thought to disrupt hormones. The new products use naturally derived, non-synthetic ingredients instead. In May last year the Co-op announced it had banned phthalates and artificial musks from its household products. The Co-op's David Croft stated: 'We believe there's enough credible evidence against their use to avoid them'.

M&S told us it's also planning to remove all chemicals of concern from products such as air fresheners, toiletries and fabrics. The Co-op has already extended its chemical ban to toiletries.

Friends of the Earth said both companies deserved 'considerable credit' for their actions. Greenpeace agreed and told us: 'M&S in particular is making good progress'.

We'll be looking further into our exposure to chemicals and pollutants in June's *Which?*.



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