



Food & health



Health check for health services

The results of a new annual health check of local NHS services will be published by the Healthcare Commission later this month. Ratings will be published for health and hospital trusts across England, allowing patients to compare the quality of service offered in neighbouring areas.

This information could prove invaluable to patients given the choice of having an operation at hospitals in different trusts.

The commission, tasked with improving the quality of healthcare, will give each trust an overall rating as well as a score for the quality of its services and use of resources. It has assessed whether trusts are delivering basic standards of care and has looked at a range of specific services in detail, including admissions and children's services.

Go to www.nhs.uk to find out more about your local services, including those in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

You can find results of the health check at www.healthcarecommission.org.uk and from local trusts from 12 October.

5 autumn tips to beat colds and flu by taking control of your lifestyle and developing a stronger immune system



1 Try to eat at least five portions of a variety of fruit and veg every day, and a varied diet, rich in vitamin E and the essential fats in vegetable oils, nuts and seeds. A rainbow of colours and a mix of raw and cooked fruit and veg will give you a fighting chance against illness. You should eat at least one hot meal a day during winter.

2 Stay active and be healthy! Exercising for 30 minutes, five times a week, improves circulation and helps keep your body's defences in top form. If you have a regular exercise routine, stick with it through the winter months but don't take risks in wet or icy weather.



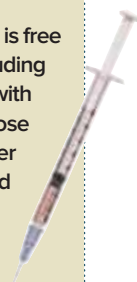
3 The average healthy person should get all the vitamins they need from a balanced diet. But a general multivitamin and mineral supplement does seem to help diabetics, the elderly and the very active. For most of us, multivitamins or high doses of vitamins C or E have no effect on the severity of a cold.



4 Cold weather causes problems by lowering your body heat and immunity and increasing the risk of breathing difficulties – so it's vital to keep warm. Wool, cotton or fleecy clothes are best. Wear several thin layers rather than one thick layer. You lose a lot of heat via your head, so wear a hat or headscarf.



5 The best time to have a flu jab is between late September and early November. Vaccination is free for 'at-risk' groups, including those over 65; people with breathing problems; those with heart, kidney or liver problems; diabetics; and those with a weakened immune system (for example, as a result of chemo). Ask your GP about revaccination every year.



Raymond Blanc – time to experiment

Raymond Blanc tells us his favourite seasonal foods in October A month that's good for game

CHEF'S CHOICE

October is good for game – and grouse is my absolute favourite. It's a myth that it needs to be hung for days. It's packed with flavour and needs only a day to rest before you cook it – don't murder it twice by hanging it! When the grouse season starts in August, it's expensive, but by October the price drops. When buying grouse the meat should feel dry and have a pleasant smell.

Keep it simple when cooking – just season, add a little butter and

then roast it in the oven. The meat should have a juniper berry taste, from the heather and berries the grouse feed on. As a perfect accompaniment, take the last of the autumn blackberries, gently cook them down with a little sugar and serve with the grouse.

October is also a fantastic time to eat beef, as the cows have been out feeding on lush, fresh grass all summer and so the meat is wonderful. During the colder months, cows are moved indoors and fed on dry food, so the meat isn't as flavoursome.

At my restaurant, Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons, we grow a lot of the fresh produce we serve, so using seasonal food has always been central to what we do.

October is a wonderful month for fruits and veg; apples, pears, quince, Jerusalem artichoke and celeriac are all good. We need to reconnect with food and the land. It's easy to experiment with inexpensive varieties of autumn fruit and veg.

We've grown sugar beet for the first time this year at Le Manoir, and I've been perfecting a sauerkraut-style dish with it – delicious!



35-40%
of UK road freight is linked with
distributing or producing food

FAIR FOOD FOUNDATION



58%
of us buy cold and flu remedies
each year, spending £180m

MINTEL

News in brief

Free fruit and veg

The government is introducing a new healthy start scheme to encourage better eating. Vouchers for fresh fruit and veg, milk and infant formula will be offered to low-income families with young children from November. See www.healthystart.nhs.uk for details and eligibility rules.



Safer electric blankets

Age Concern has joined E.ON UK to run a free scheme testing electric blankets to ensure their safety. It runs from 9 October to 3 November at selected locations – see



www.ageconcern.org.uk. Trading standards and fire brigades may also run similar schemes. See your local press for details of one near you.

What's up, doc?

BestTreatments is a website run by the British Medical Journal which aims to rate health and medical treatments, based on how well they work. Medical experts sift through research papers relating to a wide variety of illnesses and medical conditions and give straightforward information for patients about different treatment options. See www.besttreatments.co.uk.

Fruity Faces

Aimed at younger kids, inflatable Fruity Faces clip on to a school bag or belt loop and keep fruit safe and unbashed till lunchtime. £3.99 each (plus £1.50 p&p) from www.fruityfaces.com (01372 844717).



The future's bright, the future's, well, a local apple...

Back to the old country

FLAVOUR OF THE MONTH

We're now officially in apple season, so what better time to try out some of the thousand or so varieties that thrive in the UK's good apple-growing climate?

During the summer most of our apples come from New Zealand, South Africa and South America. Even now, during our season, apples grown here represent just 30 per cent of the total sold.

Despite years of decline, Adrian Barlow, Chief Executive of trade association English Apples and Pears, remains optimistic about the future. And his confidence seems to stem from growing support from an unlikely quarter.

The big supermarket chains have begun to respond to consumer concerns about carbon emissions that result when food products are transported thousands of miles across the globe – and are starting to stock more locally produced apples.

For example, Waitrose is aiming for 70 per cent of its apples this autumn to be from the UK.



Apple source: UK varieties are identified by this logo

Support is coming from an unlikely quarter

Cox's Orange Pippin – one of Adrian's top tips for this year – should be widely available in supermarkets but other home-grown apples to look out for at this time of year include Egremont Russet, Charles Ross and Worcester. You can usually find more unusual, locally produced apples from farm shops and farmers' markets.

The Soil Association told us that organic varieties favoured by supermarkets tend to come from abroad.

Pests and diseases found here make them tricky to produce without their natural blemishes and roughness – which don't affect the taste. But this means that they fall foul of supermarkets' strict requirements on fruit and vegetables' appearances.

However, the association says a number of disease-resistant organic varieties have been developed, and it's working with retailers to widen their specifications.

If you can't find UK organic apples in your supermarket, try local farmers' markets and organic box delivery schemes in your area.

To enjoy the entire UK range, visit Kent's Brogdale National Fruit Collection (www.brogdale.org) – it has more than 2,300 apple varieties, many of which are on sale.

Your say

Gardening Which? expert Rosemary Ward says: 'October's a great time to plant apple trees. Avoid varieties you can easily buy as fruit, many of which are hard to grow. Scrumptious is a good new variety, and it's self-fertile, so you need only one tree to get a crop. Otherwise, if there aren't other apple trees nearby, you'll need two different varieties so they'll cross pollinate. Discovery, Greensleeves, Katja, Red

Falstaff and Winter Gem are all good choices. Plants grafted on to dwarfing or semi-dwarfing rootstocks will be most suitable, as they produce trees of a manageable size'.

■ **The next food and health news will be in January, and the seasonal food we'll be investigating is venison. We'd like to hear your top tips, to share them with other readers. Email Julie.Lennard@helpwanted@which.co.uk**