

[food & health]

Do you have a food or health query? Contact us at letters@which.co.uk

round-up

● Trans fat update

In October, we called on the government to set targets to eliminate artery-clogging trans fats from foods, and for trans fats to be labelled (Which?, October 2004, p10). Since then, several MPs have joined our call for action, including Helen Southworth, who has tabled a Private Member's Bill calling for improved nutrition labelling. We'll keep up the pressure.

● E111 changes

From this year, your old E111 is no longer valid. If you're travelling in the EU, pick up a new E111 form from the post office. This will last until the end of the year when it will be replaced by a new European health insurance card.

● New health guides

Two new free guides are available from your GP. 'Prime' is a guide to health and local health services for the over-40s. 'Complementary Healthcare' gives advice about using complementary therapists. See www.fihealth.org.uk. 'The Complete Care Home Guide' is free from Counsel and Care (www.counselandcare.org.uk).



TASTE TEST

According to the makers of Vivatap, stirring this small bag into a glass of tap water will enhance the taste by removing chlorine, and improve water quality by adding minerals and reducing acidity. All this for around 8p a litre. So does it live up to its claims? Better taste isn't guaranteed: in a blind taste test with 31 people, we found little difference between the number of people who favoured Vivatap-treated water and those who preferred regular London tap water. As for quality, Professor Simon Judd, an expert in water sciences, told us that the ingredients – chitosan, coral algae and vitamin C – have the potential to purify water. But studies from Vivatap show that, while it can remove chlorine, it has little impact on the acidity or mineral content of UK tap water.



AD WATCH

'Once I turned 45, I found out my risk of a heart attack was increasing. I had a chat with my pharmacist, who told me my risk could be as much as 1 in 7... Now I'm using Zocor Heart-Pro and eating a healthy diet to reduce my risk.' We think this advert for the cholesterol-lowering drug Zocor (now available without a prescription) is inaccurate and misleading. It doesn't explain that the one in seven figure is the risk of having a heart attack in the next ten years (this applies to men over 55, and to men aged 45 to 54 and women over 55 who are overweight, smoke, or have a family history of heart disease). The omission stops readers from making a true assessment of their own risk. The drugs have rare yet potentially devastating side effects, including muscle wasting, so must be taken only by people in real need. We have complained to the medicines regulator and the Advertising Standards Authority.



WALK THIS WAY

Experts agree that we should walk 10,000 steps (around five miles) each day to stay healthy. A pedometer – a small electrical device worn on the hip to measure each step – makes the counting easy. But make sure you buy a good one. We tested nine models and found the free pedometer from Walkers crisps and the Freestyle Micro (£12) were inaccurate. 'I clocked up about 500 steps just sitting on the train,' our Freestyle Micro tester told us. The most reliable were the Sportline (£13), pictured, the Eurohike multi-function (£15) and the Silva Plus (£15), all from high-street shops. These all count distance as well as steps. The Yamax SW200 (£20 online) was accurate but can't measure distance.

Not all our testers found it easy to fit in 10,000 steps a day. One found that 'an average day in the office generates only 2,500 steps'. But all enjoyed using the devices, and one said it was 'an incentive to walk a bit further.' Many managed to reach the target by adding in simple activities: 'I was surprised at how many steps I took while out shopping,' one tester told us.



TESCO BACKS DOWN ON PORK WATER

Bowing to consumer demands, Tesco has stopped adding water to its Finest raw pork. Tesco had told us that the water, along with added glucose syrup and salt, 'made for better tasting, more succulent meat'. But the new water-free pork chops remain in the premium Finest range. This begs the question – how much did the water really improve the meat and how much did it pump up Tesco's profits? The Finest chops cost £2 per kg more than the standard version (which never contained water).

