

# [food & health]

Contact us at [foodandhealth@which.co.uk](mailto:foodandhealth@which.co.uk) with your questions and opinions

## roundup

### ● Fair Trade goes mainstream

Multinational food manufacturer Nestlé has announced that it will be launching a Fair Trade coffee. We'll be looking at Fair Trade in detail in March's magazine.



### ● Organic whisky

The Organic Spirit Company has launched the first Soil Association-accredited organic whisky. Highland Harvest is a blended malt, available from Sainsbury's at £15 for a 70cl bottle.

### ● New white paper

The government's white paper on health is due out this month. We are lobbying for improvements to GPs' out-of-hours services.

### ● Ads for children

Communications watchdog Ofcom is due to publish a consultation document on advertising junk food to children. Which? is supporting a ban on adverts for food high in fat, sugar and salt being shown during the times when children watch TV.

## CHOICE IN THE NHS

This month sees more reforms under the government's 'Creating a Patient-led NHS' manifesto. For planned treatments such as hip replacements, your GP will offer you four or five care options, including private centres. By 2008, patients will be able to choose from any provider that can deliver services to NHS standards.

The government says introducing competition through choice will reduce waiting times and increase the quality of care. We think, however, that although these proposals may address some consumer concerns, such as faster treatment for people prepared to travel away from home, they are not a co-ordinated response to consumers' needs.

The overwhelming priority for most people remains access to good local services that eliminate the need for choice.



## ENGLISH TEA

Tea is the national obsession – we currently drink 165 million cups a day. So it's good news for tea lovers that Tregothnan English Estate Tea is now being grown on Cornwall's Tregothnan estate.

Available from [www.tregothnantea.com](http://www.tregothnantea.com), the limited edition single-estate blend will set you back £55 a pack. There is also a version of the tea blended with Assam and China leaf, available as 25 tea bags, £9.95 plus £2 P&P, or 100g and 50g loose leaf.

We bought the blended teabags and asked 29 colleagues to try the English cuppa. Those who liked it described it as 'light and delicate', while those less keen described it as 'bland'. Our verdict? It's a good tea but not really anything special, and it's unlikely to seriously challenge the major tea producers.



## YOUR FOOD QUESTIONS

Dietitian Catherine Collins answers your nutritional queries

**Q1** I've seen that eat more than 6g of salt each day; why is that? And what's the difference between salt and sodium?

A high salt intake can increase the risk of developing high blood

pressure, which can cause a stroke or heart disease. If you reduced your average daily intake of 9.5g of salt by a third to 6g a day (about one level teaspoon), you would reduce your risk of having a stroke by 13 per cent and heart disease by 10 per cent.

Sometimes food manufacturers label the amount of sodium rather than salt. As salt comprises 40 per cent sodium and 60 per cent chloride, you need to multiply the sodium level by 2.5 to get the amount of salt. So 1,000mg (1g) of sodium is equal to 2.5g of salt – or nearly half your daily amount.

Bear in mind that your salt intake isn't just

from table salt in food. Processed foods and ready meals often have high levels of sodium, from salt and other sources such as raising agents (sodium bicarbonate), flavourings (monosodium glutamate, sodium citrates and cyclamate), and meat preservatives (sodium nitrate).

**Q2** Now that it's winter, is there any special diet or supplements you'd recommend to help prevent sniffles?

Coughs and colds are caused by bacteria or viral infections. The best basic protection is to eat a varied diet, rich in dietary vitamin E and the essential fats

(from nuts, seeds, and vegetable oils rather than animal fats).

Supplements are popularly thought to boost our immune defences. A general multivitamin and mineral supplement does appear to reduce infection in those at a higher risk – people with diabetes, the elderly, or people who do a lot of physical activity – but for most of us, multivitamins or large doses of vitamin C and/or vitamin E have no effect on a cold's severity or duration.

You can also get zinc supplements and lozenges, which may reduce slightly the severity of a cold's symptoms, although not its duration.