

Get Protected

THE FREE NEWSLETTER OF TAMESIDE MBC ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH & CONSUMER SERVICES

PROVIDING HELP AND ADVICE FOR CONSUMERS AND BUSINESSES OF TAMESIDE

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BALANCE OF GOOD HEALTH

In spite of confusing publicity, there is wide agreement among experts on what is a healthy style of eating. To stay healthy, you need a 'fuel mix' that no single food can provide. Different foods supply different mixtures of the essentials.

The main groups of foods needed to achieve a healthy balance are:

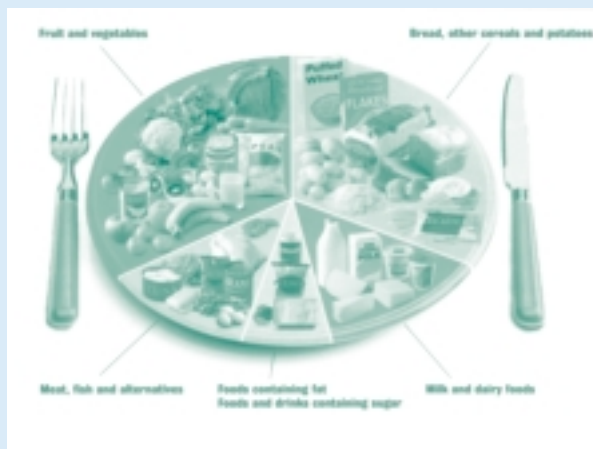
- * Bread, other cereals and potatoes - Starchy foods like pasta, rice and potatoes should be the main part of most meals, forming about a third of all the food eaten in a day. They are not high in calories, provided you don't add much fat or sugar.

- * Fruit and vegetables - These provide valuable vitamins, minerals and fibre, with little fat. It is recommended that you eat at least five portions a day. Try to eat some at every meal and as snacks.

- * Milk and dairy foods - These foods are rich in calcium, for strong bones and teeth. They are, however, high in fat; so choose reduced fat versions, such as skimmed milk. It has as much calcium, protein and B vitamins as full fat milk.

- * Meat, fish and alternatives - Such as eggs, nuts, beans and lentils, are in this group. They provide protein, vitamins and minerals, but you don't need large amounts. Avoid fattier meats and too many eggs and nuts.

- * Foods containing fat and sugar - Are not essential to a healthy diet, but add extra choice and interest. Use small amounts of margarine and spreads. Don't eat cakes too often. And sugary foods such as fizzy drinks should be eaten at mealtimes to reduce the risk of tooth decay.



Finally, the amount of salt most of us eat can encourage high blood pressure. This increases the risk of heart and kidney disease. It's worth cutting down by reducing salt at the table, adding less in cooking and buying less of salted foods like bacon, cheese, many convenience meals, savoury snacks, pickles and smoked fish.

PLAN TO HALT POULTRY SCAM

It became apparent from recent investigations that controls were not adequately protecting consumers from unfit meat entering the food chain.

In December 2000, 7 people were convicted at Hull Crown Court of conspiracy to defraud by selling meat unfit for human consumption. In March 2001, a joint investigation by Amber Valley Council and the police led to the seizure of 20 tonnes of unfit poultry meat.

The controls in place needed to be tightened and loopholes needed to be closed. So, the Food Standards Agency announced an action plan to tighten the laws that prevent unfit poultry meat entering the food chain.

The new plan includes:

- * Introducing a requirement to stain unfit poultry meat; as is already the case with red meat.
- * Extending staining to cover licensed cold stores & cutting plants - as opposed to abattoirs only
- * A commitment to improve quality assurance and traceability in the supply chain
- * Working with the meat industry to develop a code of practice on the handling and disposal of animal by products, and
- * Considering controls for food vendors who may not know the source of the products they are trading in.

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ATOL PROTECTED



How can you check if you're TOL protected?

- * Look for the ATOL logo in adverts and brochures.
- * If you can't see an ATOL logo, check with the CAA
- * If you book through a travel agent, ask which ATOL holder will appear on your ATOL receipt. Don't book if the agent won't tell you!

If you buy an air package from an agent that isn't from an ATOL holder's brochure, ask whether all the items you book will be on the ATOL receipt - if a hotel or car hire is receipted separately, it won't be ATOL protected.

If it hasn't got an ATOL, don't book it at all!

ATOL is a protection scheme for flights and air holidays, managed by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA). Most firms who sell air travel in the UK are required by law to hold a licence called an ATOL.

ATOL protects you from losing money or being stranded abroad when a tour operator goes bust. All licensed firms have to lodge bonds with the CAA, so that if they go out of business, the CAA can give refunds to people who can't travel and arrange for people abroad to finish their holidays and fly home.

ATOL protection is included in the price of a holiday booked with an ATOL holder.

How can you tell if a flight or air holiday is ATOL protected?

The simple rule is 'Ticket or ATOL'.

If you pay any money, even a deposit, to a travel firm in the UK for a flight or a package holiday by air, the sale usually has to be ATOL protected. As soon as you pay any money, you must be given an ATOL receipt. The ATOL receipt gives the name of the licensed firm you're booked with and its ATOL number.

The exceptions to the 'Ticket or ATOL' rule include: booking direct with an airline, rather than a travel firm; booking from outside the UK, and getting a scheduled air ticket straight away.

CHEMICALS IN COSMETICS

A bathroom cabinet full of products that promise to keep you looking younger and more beautiful. Does that sound familiar? But take a closer look at the labels and you'll find that they contain chemicals that are neither healthy nor glamorous.

More than 1000 ingredients used in cosmetics and toiletries could have harmful effects, according to one Doctor. It should also be added, however, that the bathroom cabinet is not a minefield and the majority of cosmetics are perfectly safe.

Every cosmetic product must, by law, list its ingredients on its packaging. Here are some key chemicals to look out for -

Make-Up

* **Formaldehyde** - Used in the manufacture of cigarettes! It is banned in beauty products in Japan and Sweden. In the UK and Europe, it is widely added to preserve make-up. It is an irritant and possibly linked to cancer.

* **Triethanolamine** - This controls acidity in eyeliner and foundations, ensuring they don't change colour. It can cause dermatitis and contains carcinogenic impurities.

* **Propylene Glycol** - An oil used in industrial anti-freeze! It is often used in foundations and lipsticks to seal in moisture and keep lips soft. It is connected to liver abnormalities and kidney damage.



Skin Care

* **DEA, TEA and MEA** - Often found in facial cleansers and bubble baths. They are not dangerous in themselves, but if combined with nitrates, a common preservative, they become carcinogenic.

* **Alpha-Hydroxy Acids** - Often used in products that claim to be revitalising or smoothing, these gently remove the old layer of skin. Many dermatologists believe this process is harmful because natural protection from the sun and pollution is lost.

* **Collagen** - It is made of animals' hoofs and skins, including chicken feet. Very widely used to make skin younger, but may cause spots in some people!

Look out for the worst culprits - formaldehyde, propylene glycol, sodium lauryl sulphate and sodium laureth sulphate.

RIP-OFF, TIP-OFF

A new website has been developed to let you tell us about traders who you think are 'ripping off' the UK public -

www.ripofftipoff.net

Unfortunately, in every trading area there are some people who want to cheat us out of money.

Below are some of the more common cons, but remember there are rogues who are continually devising new ways to get you to part with your money - so be on your guard!!

Cowboy Builders - may knock at your door and pressurise you into agreeing for them to carry out work or repairs on your property. Usually the work is shoddy and you end up out of pocket, because you can't track them down to complain.

Doorstep Traders - use hard pressure sale tactics and often prey on the elderly. Typical 'offers' include overpriced home security systems and 'free' damp-proof surveys that end up costing an arm and a leg.

Rogue Car Dealers - profit by buying second-hand cars with high mileage's and then turn back the mileage reading, to increase the value of the car. They also supply false service history records and logbooks to con buyers.

Loan Sharks - prey on vulnerable people like the unemployed, single parents or people who have poor credit ratings and offer to lend them money at extortionate interest rates.

Homeworking Schemes - operators also prey on vulnerable people who can not go out to work. They ask you to send money to register, or never pay out because they claim that your work is not up to standard.

THE EURO EXPLAINED

The Euro is now the single currency of the European Monetary Union - Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain.

Although the UK is retaining its national currency, some shops will be accepting euros as payment. It is also likely that major tourist attractions will also accept the euro.

The introduction of the euro will make it easier for people travelling to the euro-zone countries. It will be easier for you to understand how much you are paying for goods and services in those countries.



In the past year, the euro has been worth 60-65p. Although its value varies against sterling, this will give you a rough estimate for a quick conversion. You should also bear in mind that the larger denomination notes are worth a lot of money - for example, a 500 euro note is worth over £300, so you may wish to carry only lower value notes.

If you have any old foreign currency for the 12 euro-zone countries after the end of February 2002, your only option will be to exchange it for sterling at a bank, or donate it to charity. In the UK, banks will be able to accept notes, but may charge for changing coins.

VALUE FOR PHONE-Y?

The DTI commissioned research to find out how easy it is for a consumer to get the best value for money, and whether the format of presented information helps or hinders the process of buying a mobile phone.

Summary of Findings

- * Taken as a whole, information that was provided to consumers looking for reasonable mobile phone deals was helpful.
- * Shops provided consistent and sensible advice.
- * Written information was deemed to be opaque, generally unclear, unhelpful, or even misleading, and
- * Consumers are often driven by factors beyond price when choosing a mobile phone package. They tend to use:
 - the same network as their friends, and
 - prepay packages, despite having more expensive call charges, because they give greatest financial control.

Do Consumers get a Fair Deal?

- * According to Ofcom, 78% of mobile phone customers are generally satisfied with the range of advice and information available.
- * New tariff packages will allow consumers to have irregular patterns of usage, without fearing a loss of price competitiveness, and
- * Particularly those from lower income families, prefer the financial control that prepay phones give them, even though they are aware they could get a better deal on monthly payment packages.

THE CAR OWNER'S GUIDE

Servicing your car will make it last longer. It also makes it safer for you, your passengers and the environment. Here are some tips to help you avoid dodgy garages, get effective work done and achieve good value for money.

A reliable garage will certainly do some, or all, of the following:

- * Display a menu of fixed cost work
- * Tell you how much they will charge to diagnose a fault, if it includes dismantling and putting back together
- * Be a member of a trade association or 'Fair Play Charter'
- * Have trained staff and display certificates, and
- * Have a complaints procedure.

Servicing is specific, repair often isn't:

- * Ask exactly what the service includes and costs, so you can compare garages, and
- * Ask what is included under the headings 'engine', 'brakes', 'electrics', 'steering', 'bodywork' and 'suspension'.

Repair - be as specific as you can:

- * Get a written quote (a fixed price for work specified), not an estimate
- * If you don't know what's wrong, get a fixed price for diagnosis
- * Put what you want them to do in writing and make it clear that further work will need approval
- * Tell the garage what you want, and
- * If you're clear about what you want and how much it will cost, there is less chance of the garage doing extra, or unnecessary work. So be precise; don't just say you have a rattle!

For servicing and repair:

- * Find out how long the work will take and agree on a collection time
- * Check whether they've fitted manufacturer's parts and insist on seeing the parts they've removed
- * Ask about guarantees on labour and parts
- * Insist on an itemised bill, and
- * Agree how you will pay before the work is done.

REMEMBER - Know what you want, shop around, be specific and get everything in writing.



YOUR BIT COUNTS

Pollution, wasting energy, wasting water, recycling. Not my Problem! That's what many people think. But, **as individuals**, we can all do simple things to help protect and improve our environment.

But what can I do?

Take local air pollution. You and your children's health could be at risk. Local pollution, such as car fumes, can aggravate asthma and cause premature deaths in those seriously ill. But you can help by, where, possible, not using your car for short journeys, sharing car journeys with friends and family and having your car serviced regularly.

Pollution is affecting the whole world. The burning of fuel in power stations and oil refineries provides you with the energy you use in your home and car. This burning of fuel also pumps out

'greenhouse gases' which lead to climate change. In the UK, this could mean more floods and storms, drier summers and wetter winters.

You can do your bit to fight climate change and save money at the same time by saving energy and resources.

Doing your bit at home

Action to help our environment really does start at home -

- * **Central heating.** Many people overheat their homes. Just turning your thermostat down by 1 degree could cut your heating bill by 10%!
- * **Kettles.** Every time you make a cuppa, boil just the water you need and, in one week, you'd save enough energy to light your house for a day!
- * **Lights.** Remember to turn off any lights you don't need. Switching off an unnecessary light for just one night saves enough energy to run a stereo for 24 hours!
- * **Lights.** Installing just one energy-saving light bulb could save you £10 a year. If every household installed one, we could power the lighting currently used in 3 million homes a year!
- * **TVs computers and hi-fis.** Don't leave these on stand-by. Switch them off using the on/off button on the machine.
- * **Washing machines.** Save water and energy by using a lower temperature wash or the economy programme and by washing a full load, rather than a half.
- * **Fridges.** Let food cool down before you put it in the fridge or freezer and avoid leaving the fridge door open for longer than you need.
- * **Water.** Taking a shower instead of a bath can save enough water each week to make 1000 cups of tea!
- * **Water.** Check all taps for drips. A dripping tap can waste enough water in a day to run a shower for 5 minutes!